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Playing for High Stakes.

BY ANNIE THOMAS.

CHAPTER I.

MISS TALBOT COMES HOME.

THERE was very little light left in the sky on the cold, murky January night on which this story commences. The moon was young and easily overshadowed, and though the first watch of the night was given to the "red planet Mars," he kept it unseen by the citizens of London. Fog, in fact, reigned supreme, when the girl who is to play the first part in this drama got out of a respectable-looking brougham at the door of a tall house in Victoria Street, Westminster, and prepared to enter it, and upon the career through which we shall follow her.

The broad blaze of light which fell out to meet and welcome her, as it were, dazzled her for an instant as she went up the steps and into the hall—a hall that, in the language of advertisements, was really of palatial proportions, and up from which a spiral staircase curved away into space. A fire burned in a huge stove in the center, and a burly porter sat in a huge chair by the door of this hall. Altogether there was a discomposing air of magnitude about everything that was oppressive to a tired traveler who found herself in London for the first time in her life."

"I am Miss Talbot; can I have come to the right house?" she asked, quickly, of a grim-looking servant in gray livery, who had come out on the step to meet her. And he conveyed to her mind the fact that she had come to the right house; that it "would be well for her to walk up stairs; and that master would be home to dinner in half an hour," in the low tones and succinct manner of well-trained servitude.

Co-existent with the oppression, there had been a sense of elation at the size and splendor of this home to which she had come. But the elation vanished as she mounted flight after flight of the broad, cold, clean stone stairs; and it was borne in upon her mind, through the agency of several brass plates on several doors, that many families were resident in this mansion; and that it was a fair pedestrian feat to mount from the street door to the topmost "flat," where her brother, to whom she had come home, dwelt in bachelor freedom and comfort, which he was about to break up for her sake.

Elation was her portion again when she came into the brightly-lighted, thickly-carpeted hall, and caught glimpses, through the open doors, of several luxuriously-furnished rooms. There was an atmosphere of more than comfort over the home Edgar Talbot had prepared for his sister. There was refinement, elegance—"warmth and color," too—or she, with her warm and glowing tastes, would not have sympathized with it all so suddenly as she did, even while walking along leisurely to the room that was at once pointed out to her as hers, and seeming to glance carelessly about her.

She enjoyed it all with such a hearty, young, strong appreciation! Enjoyed it for itself, without giving much thought to the possible motive which had brought it about. For a few minutes, as she stood between two subtly-adjusted glasses that reflected her own perfect figure and all the delicate appointments of the room, she forgot that a brother, whom she had never seen to remember, was coming home to dinner in half an hour. Then she reminded herself of it and the old adage about first impressions; and then she went on to attire herself for the meeting, with all the kindest memories of him which she could collect, and by reorganizing her dress.

There had been little plot, little incident, little action in her life as yet. Twenty years ago she had been left (a baby of two) to the care

of an old maiden aunt of her mother's. The latter had lapsed out of her life soon after the death of her husband; who in turn had died after a feeble wrestle with fever in Calcutta, leaving four children, for whom he provided as follows:

To his eldest son, Edgar Talbot, he left the whole of his business and personal property, charged with the following legacies and bequests, viz.:

To his widow £150 per annum only, "because her tastes were simple, and more would be unnecessary."

To Lionel Talbot, his second son, five thousand pounds, and a recommendation to go into the army when he should be old enough.

To Marion Talbot, his eldest daughter, one thousand pounds and her mother's jewels.

To Beatrix Talbot, his youngest daughter—not even so much as a mention.

There were many reasons assigned at the time for this cruel and unjust caprice, by people who knew nothing about it. Men said that old Talbot must have had good cause for making such an invidious exception with regard to the baby Beatrix; and Mrs. Talbot heard the sayings in silence, and bent her already bowed head still lower, and offered no one an explanation. Hard words and harder suspicions were bruited abroad, even in the first days of her widowhood, about the pale, pretty woman who had meekly borne the burden of being old Talbot's wife for thirteen or fourteen years, and who now could not be got to declare that there was anything unfair in a will that not only left her youngest child and herself paupers, but that put them under a heavy cloud. Without demur, or repining, or reproach, she accepted the position, and let evil tongues wag unchecked, unchid, until her boys' guardians relieved her of their charge; then she brought her daughters home to the house of her aunt in the English country, and presently faded away under the influence of the cloud which had no silver lining.

The children's guardians had removed Marian from that quiet old home at her mother's death. But Beatrix had been suffered to remain on—there were no instructions about her. Marian went to school and grew and prospered; and at nineteen—five or six years before the opening of this story—"married very comfortably," every one said, and she never contradicted them; and, together with the rest of the Talbots, concurred in forgetting the little outcast down at Stoke Basing—who had, meanwhile, developed from the baby Bee into a beautiful girl, known as Miss Talbot throughout the country-side. A girl from whom the shadow cast by her father's neglect was lifted as soon as she was looked upon. A bright, brave, thoroughbred creature, who had grown into every feminine grace without care or culture, or consideration from the brothers and sisters who were but names to her.

When their mother died, the £150 which had been left by the Calcutta merchant to his widow for life, was still, by the clemency of the managers of Edgar's fortune, remitted quarterly for the benefit of the child, for whom no provision had been made. The same arrangement continued after Edgar attained his majority, and took matters into his own hands. On this £150 Beatrix was a princess among the people of Stoke Basing. It provided her with every comfort; more—with every luxury she had ever heard. As a child, it gave her a pony, and music, and dancing and drawing lessons—"the best the neighborhood afforded," her aunt, old Miss Lennox, was wont to assert. As a grown-up girl, it gave her freedom from the miseries of small economies, a riding-horse and little basket phaeton; a considerable power of relieving the want and squalor which abounded in that flourishing agricultural parish, and a certain independence which showed itself in a bright, cheery toleration for whims and querulous manifestations of authority, which would have been irksome to the point of non-endurance had the girl not felt that it was within her power to break her bonds at any time.

For Miss Lennox was not at all the ideal aged relative of romance. She was a hard-mannered, good, conscientious, narrow-minded woman, who, though she would have charged herself with her niece's child at any cost and under any circumstances, never failed to count the



FRANK BATHURST WITH LIONEL AND THE TWO GIRLS SAT ON THE BANK OF THE LAKE.

former and bewail the latter as among her many crosses. There was compensation in the conviction Miss Lenox had that these (the crosses) were giving her a high place among the elect of Stoke Basing. And there was consolation in the reflection that the cost would have been greater, and the circumstances more lamentable, had Beatrix had nothing a year of her own instead of £150.

On the whole, it must be confessed that it was merely the sorrow of surprise and uncertainty—merely the shock one feels at any long-continued habit of living being abruptly rent asunder, which Beatrix Talbot experienced when old Miss Lenox died. The great difference the event would make in her life did not present itself to her mind. She was conscious, vaguely, that it would necessitate some alteration in her mode of living. She would want fewer servants and a smaller house; she would want some one to spend the long winter evenings with her; and—there her plans became wavy, and she felt that she would need to consult some friend, and knew that she had none whose counsel she could care to take.

But before the funeral day came Beatrix was relieved of the responsibility of herself. Her eldest brother, Edgar, wrote to her and offered her a home with him in words that read like an order. She was to go to him as soon as she could conveniently pack up her personal belongings; and she was “to believe that henceforth her happiness and welfare would be the chief objects in life of her affectionate brother,

“EDGAR TALBOT.”

She was very glad to believe that, or any thing else that sounded kind in those early days of the desolation that always sets in after the death of any one—glad to believe it, and anxious to go up and verify it. She was on the point of doing the latter (she hoped) when we parted from her just now.

She had done away with every trace of travel-stain and weariness when she came out of her room in response to a communication she received that Mr. Talbot was waiting for her in the drawing room. It was so natural to her to be careful and fastidious, and to study the becoming at all times, and she had never felt the obligation upon her to obey this natural instinct so strongly as she did to-night. “I should like him to think me nice at once,” she thought, as she moved along to the meeting, alternately depressed by the fear that her brother might find her rustic and uncultivated, and cheered by the memory of the last look in the glass.

As she went into the room, a gentleman, a young man of nine-and-twenty or thirty, came forward to meet her. He kissed her on the forehead, hoped they should get on well together, and then held her off to “have a look at what the baby Bee had grown into,” as he said.

As Edgar Talbot looked down into the well-opened, fearless eyes; as he marked the expression that swept over her face as she felt the intensity of his observation—an expression that was a queer combination of blush, and frown, and smile—he read a portion of her character, and recognized all her beauty. There was plenty of pride, plenty of self-possession, and plenty of self-will in this country-nurtured sister of his. She looked as if she could be very devoted and very defiant, if she were called upon to be either. He liked her very much already. Liked her for the good looks that would surely make her remarkable; liked the turn of her head and the tone of her clear full voice; liked her for being unmistakably a gentlewoman, that even his fastidious taste could find no fault with anything save the density of her mourning dress.

There was little likeness between them; still, had you been prepared for it by the knowledge that they were brother and sister, a faint resemblance would have made itself manifest.

He was quiet in manner, quiet in voice, quiet in style. Beatrix, to whom his occupation in life was as unknown as his local habitation had been before this day, put him down for a follower of one or other of the sage professions of law or physic. He had very much the look, to her, of one who was wont to give advice and to have it taken. His tones—though his voice was low and unmarked by inflection—were quick, prompt, decided. Beatrix had been accompanied on the journey up from Stoke Basing by anticipations of liberty, equality, fraternity. These anticipations fled as he led her in to dinner, and planted her on a chair at the head of his table, and generally took care and command of her.

Gradually, as the dinner went on, Edgar Talbot evoked some old memories about their father and mother; and their old home in Calcutta, that had the effect of making Beatrix feel that, once upon a time, there had been a link, however slight, between them.

“I can just, and only just, remember mamma,” Beatrix said, in response. “It may be only that I think I can remember her, from having heard Aunt Lenox talk about her so much. Her hair used to be loose and soft and to hang over her face a good deal.”

“I have no doubt it did,” Edgar answered, as a vision of what used to strike his tight, neat young mind as untidiness in his mother crossed his memory. “Marian is very like her mother; she will be here to see you tomorrow.”

“And Lionel?”

“Lionel will come in by-and-by, I asked him to dine with us, but he is very much engaged just now with a friend of his who is ill.”

“What are they like—Marian and Lionel?”

“Marian is a charming woman, I believe. Every one who has nothing to do with her is quite delighted with Mrs. Sutton. But you will have much to do with her naturally; therefore I warn you, Beatrix, Marian is a fool, and a dangerous one.”

“And Lionel?”

“Lionel and I don’t look upon life in the same way, but for all that I know him to be one of the best fellows that ever breathed.”

And, for the first time, there was a touch of feeling in Mr. Talbot’s voice.

“He is in the army, is he not?” Beatrix asked.

“In an army the ranks of which are rather too crowded for there to be much chance of speedy promotion. He is an artist, and a clever one, too.”

“And now tell me about Mr. Sutton, Edgar.” Beatrix said, calling her brother by his Christian name for the first time.

“Mr. Sutton is—Marian’s husband. His mission in life is to be always on the look-out to save his wife from the consequences of her own folly, and to do it without being detected. For a few weeks you will be very much with Marian. I am sorry to say it is unavoidable; and I tell you again that you must be careful with her.”

“It is almost impossible to put you on guard against the precise form of mischief she may work. Once accept the fact of her being false, even when there is not the remotest possibility of her gaining any thing by it, and you will be all right. You will soon be independent of her. I have secured an unexceptionable chaperon for you.”

“Will she live here—with us?” Beatrix asked, in a dismayed tone.

“Of course she will live here,” Mr. Talbot replied, laughing. “My dear girl, you did not imagine that, in our position, you could be left to take yourself into society, did you?”

“Shall I not go with you, Edgar? I really know nothing about it, remember, only I thought”—

“That you could live a life of picturesque independence in London. No, no; you will soon see the advantage as well as the necessity of having Mrs. Lyon with you.”

For a few moments Beatrix struggled against the conviction that she should not soon see either the advantages or the necessity of the invader; then, even to herself, she seemed to conquer it. It was flattering that her brother should have such a high sense of what was due to her, that he seemed bent on using all the precautions in his power that might aid in placing her well. Or was it a high sense of what was due to himself only? She had no time to consider the question, for, immediately as it arose, Mr. Lionel Talbot was announced, and her store of family interests and feelings was at once increased.

Her heart went out affectionately to this second brother on the instant, as, just placing a hand on Edgar’s shoulder in passing, Lionel came up and greeted her with a loving kindness that brought her nearer to him at once than she ever could be to Edgar, she felt. He looked as he was, several years the junior of Mr. Talbot. There was still a good deal of boyish frankness in his face, and boyish fervor in his manner, and boyish freshness in his heart.

He was a bright-hearted man, who unconsciously impressed others through the agency of the inborn trust he had in truth in every conceivable form. The sentiment Edgar had expressed was a very general one about Lionel Talbot. “Lionel and I don’t look upon life in the same way; but for all that I know him to be one of the best fellows that ever breathed,” was the unspoken thought of most men whose ways of life were much with the young painter who was playing for high stakes almost unwittingly.

“Affectionate as he is to me, and honestly glad as he is to seeme, I wonder he never found me out at Stoke Basing,” Beatrix thought. Then she worded her wonder—his clear blue eyes, his open brow, and the smiling lips which the yellow mustache partially concealed, invited confidence.

“I have spent my life in Germany and Italy,” he answered. “I only came to England a month ago, Beatrix. I am almost as great a stranger to Edgar and Marian as you can be.”

“What is Edgar?” Beatrix asked, when Mr. Talbot had been summoned to speak to some one on business.

“He is on the Stock Exchange,” Lionel replied.

“It’s like gambling, is it not?” she interrogated; but Lionel only replied by putting a song before her, and showing her how to sing it.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. SUTTON IS FRANK.

“MARIAN is going to call on you at two—she will take you for a drive if you will go,” Mr. Talbot said to his sister the following morning, as she came into the dining-room. He was standing up with his hat in his hand. “I could not wait for you,” he explained, hurriedly. “You will not mind breakfasting alone, I hope?”

“Oh no—not this morning; but I’ll get up in future, and breakfast with you, Edgar.”

“Or perhaps you would rather have it in your dressing-room? I am often taken up a good deal with letters. Will you mind meeting Marian alone? Shall I take you round to her house, and introduce you, or will you wait for her here?”

“I will wait for her here.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so—glad that you didn’t feel called upon to sham sentiment about it. Well, good-bye, dear!” He stooped and kissed her. “Take care of yourself.”

“She put her hand on his shoulder to detain him, as she answered:

“Thank you, Edgar, very much.”

“For what?”

“For caring for me so. I like it—oh! I like it so much—it is new to me.”

“My dear girl! you will have it in your power to do more for me, unless you disappoint me greatly, than I ever can for you.”

“How? Tell me.”

“In a thousand ways, that you will learn in time; and, eventually, by such a marriage as Miss Talbot ought to make, and you will easily make.”

“You don’t want to get rid of me yet?” she asked laughing. “I had a vision, as I traveled up yesterday of keeping house for you, as Ruth Pinch did for her brother.”

“And of passing happy hours over the construction of a similar pie to that immortal one that brought about her ‘fate,’ as you would call it, I suppose? No; you’re not the Ruth Pinch or Dame Durden type of woman, Beatrix—thank heaven for it!”

He went away now, laughing and nodding to her gayer at heart and in gait than he had been for years. There was something very enlivening to the keen young business-man in the sight of that beautiful girl sitting there, leaning her elbow on the table, resting her chin in her hand—something enlivening in the sight of her, and reassuring in the recollection that she was his sister. He had never had youthful companionship in his home before. There was a fair promise of good refreshing interest in the presence of one so full of the glory of life as he saw her to be. As he went away he congratulated himself heartily. “She has the best gift that a woman can have—beauty—luckily for me,” he thought; and then he reflected with pleasure that Mrs. Lyon would aid him in bringing that beauty well into the light of day.

“I hope what I have said to her will neutralize any thing Marian may tell her about Blanche; for Mrs. Sutton is safe to shoot her little bolt at Miss Lyon,” he muttered, as he passed clear out of the home atmosphere, on his way to a very different one. Then he was soon joined by other men, and his mind became absorbed in some other tickets which he had drawn or might draw in the lottery of life. He was aware of a sort of exultation in his own mind as he went along—an exultation that the majority of men must experience more or less frequently—a sense of there being a great deal to be got out of that portion of his life which was outside his home. Many of his ends could be furthered by his sister Beatrix, if her will would go with his—many others were utterly beyond, entirely above (he almost believed) her aid and understanding.

Additionally, away in the most secret corner of his heart, he had an interest that no one could share with him—a hope that was fitfully bright and feverishly warm, and that was at once the sweetest and most painful element of his life—a love that fought with every determination and resolve he had ever made. Up to the present he knew himself to be well fenced in from a danger that was dear to him; but in the weakness of over-reliance in his own strength, he was going to lay down his arms, open the gates of the citadel, and let in an enemy whom he believed to be unconscious of her own prowess, and so innocuous. He had given himself a great many beautiful reasons for this rash step; he had called it duty toward a too-long neglected sister, and earnest desire to see her so well brought forward as to insure her own happiness and his aggrandizement in the future. But when all the beautiful reasons were given, and blindly accepted by himself, the truth remained. He sighed for the frequent sight of a woman who had stamped herself upon his soul and made him love her—sighed, yearned, thirsted for her presence, though he never meant to do more than sun himself in it while he could; and knew that when it was withdrawn he should perish in the chill which must ensue. And the woman he loved was Blanche Lyon, for the sake of whose strange glances he had secured, at an absurd outlay of time, money, and false reasoning, her mother’s services as chaperon for his sister.

The day wore itself away rapidly. Two o’clock, and the immediate prospect of Mrs. Sutton’s call was upon Beatrix before she had learned the rooms and reorganized them, as women with taste are sure to want to reorganize what has been solely the realm of the upholsterer heretofore.

Miss Talbot was not affected to the point of either anxiety or enthusiasm by the anticipation of her sister’s visit.

Still she was not insensible to the fact of there being a deeper flush on her cheeks and a brighter light in her eyes than usual, when the door opened and a lady came fluttering in—a lady with a small, pale, fair face, which was adorned with half-closed, large blue eyes, and nut-brown brows and lashes, and a pert little delicately-pointed, turned-up nose, and a flexible, refined, wide mouth, over which the most subtly-sweet smile played. A lady with fascination legibly inscribed on every lineament; fascination that drugged the reasoning faculties of the majority who met her, and deadened them to the first keen irresistible impression of her being a false, treacherous, dangerous creature.

“I am Marian,” she said, putting her hands out to meet her sister; “and I am very proud to feel that there can be no doubt about your being Trixy.”

Mrs. Sutton had a shrilly-sweet voice, and she had it well under command too. It said little tender things about the joy this reunion with Beatrix afforded her very tenderly; and little, sad, semi-self-reproachful things about never having known Beatrix before very sadly. After those soft, clear, pathetic inflections Beatrix’s voice sounded deep and full in her own ears, as she answered:

“Never mind about the non-intercourse of the past Marian; we must make up for it in the future. So you’re married? and I have stupidly gone on thinking of you as a mere child.”

“I was a mere child when I married,” Mrs. Sutton replied, with a gorgeous disregard of the fact of her sister knowing very well that she (Marian) had been nothing of the kind. “I was a mere child when I married, but the five years have made me an old woman.”

She sank her voice as she said it, and lowered her head, and seemed to be flushing, and struggling with an inclination to cry. On the whole she looked surprisingly young and innocent, and Beatrix settled at once that Edgar “had been very much mistaken.”

“Ah! you must tell me about Mr. Sutton,” Miss

Talbot exclaimed, eagerly. The eagerness was as much the result of her desire to check Marian's tears as it was to know more of the other member of her family.

Marian lifted the graceful head, that was covered with black lace and crimson roses and nut-brown hair in a way that rendered it difficult to determine where nature ended and art began, and shook out a gentle, sensitive laugh, by way of recovering from the emotion she had been displaying.

"I can't bring it as a sacrifice, certainly, for I did it with my eyes wide open; but I was very young, and didn't know what I was undertaking to endure, and Edgar—but I must be careful how I speak of Edgar to you."

Beatrix leaned forward in her chair, and clasped her hands together, and wrung them hard in a small excitement.

"Yes, you must be careful," she said, ringing out her words with a bright, proud decision that Mrs. Sutton (for all her subtle inflections) never knew. "You must be careful—if Edgar has been to blame don't blame him to me; let me love him without a shadow of doubt. He has been the one to bring me back to my own—my own must not set me against him in ever so small a degree."

"Oh, Trixy! set you against him! Would I do it? Why, I shrink from doing what would be the greatest comfort to me—talking over things with another woman—a sister—because I won't say a word about Edgar that might possibly make you think him less kind than I'd like you to think him."

"Marian!"

It was only one word. But Beatrix Talbot uttered it, and Marian Sutton heard it, and both these women had a marvelous power of expressing and understanding. There was reproach and condemnation for the invidious onslaught on a brother in a single word which the one sister said to the other. And all the reproach and condemnation was meant and felt.

"Then don't ask me a word about my marriage," Mrs. Sutton replied, "but put on your bonnet and come out for a drive with me."

"We are not likely to see many people I know in the Park now," Mrs. Sutton said, as they fell in with the thin string of carriages—the speech might have been made with equal truth at any time of the year; but this Beatrix did not know, and so it sounded in her ears as if all Mrs. Sutton's friends and acquaintances were away at their respective country-houses, which was precisely the way Mrs. Sutton wished it to sound—"so we will only drive round and look at the Row."

The Row was deserted, consequently Beatrix neither was nor seemed to be impressed by it. "What a dull place to waste one's time on horseback in!" she said, leaning forward to look up the vista, that is unquestionably more striking in June than in January. "If I ride it will not be there."

Mrs. Sutton laughed. "My dear Trixy, if you ride it will be there, and nowhere else."

"Why?"

"Because Edgar will not consider you riding there a waste of time, and you will soon learn that Edgar's wishes are not to be disregarded."

Mrs. Sutton sighed as she finished, and held her throat straight, and bent her head slightly on one side, and looked altogether as if she spoke from sorrowful experience. Beatrix began to develop uneasy sensations of doubt respecting the possible mode by which Edgar had brought about the excellent marriage of his eldest sister, whose fate seemed not altogether shadowless.

Mrs. Sutton recovered her spirits again, and changed the topic by asking:

"How do you like the idea of the Lyons coming to live with you?"

"The Lyons? Am I to have more than one duenna?" Miss Talbot asked.

"Oh! Edgar has not mentioned Blanche Lyon to you, then?"

Marian smiled significantly, and gave her head a little shake, as if Edgar's reticence on the point had been clearly foreseen by her.

"No, not a word; is she Mrs. Lyon's daughter?"

"Yes," Mrs. Sutton answered; and the large blue eyes that she had kept half closed all day opened suddenly, and a light darted out from them—the cold, clear, pitiless light of hatred. "Yes; Blanche is Mrs. Lyon's daughter, and a precious pair they are. Edgar will rue the day he brought them into his house; but he would never forgive me for saying it to you, so you must keep that secret also for me, Trixy; and now we will speak of pleasanter things. You all (Lionel too) are to dine with us to-morrow night. Is not Lionel charming?"

"He is indeed!" Trixy answered, with a certain feeling of Lionel being the only sure footing she had in the family. "I long to see his paintings."

Mrs. Sutton laughed. "I long to see one, and that is a portrait of myself that I want him to paint for the Academy this year; but he is only my brother, and does not seem anxious to undertake a task that other men have begged for as a boon."

"Why did you refuse, if any one of them could have done it as well?" Trixy asked. There was something, it was hard to determine whether it was sublime or ridiculous, in the intense air of vanity with which Mrs. Sutton had made the assertion about the begging and the boon.

"Why did I refuse? Because I am obliged to be so careful, Trixy. I often wish I had been born old, and ugly, and unattractive, and then, perhaps, I might have known a little peace." Then the carriage stopped in Victoria Street, and after depositing Miss Talbot, the victim to her own youth, beauty, and attractions, rolled softly away home, where we shall follow her.

CHAPTER III.

FALSE DIPLOMACY.

THE house to which Mrs. Sutton was driven after leaving her sister was a handsome, tall, heavily-porticoed house, out at South Kensington, just opposite to the barren wilderness where the Exhibition of 1862 stood. The size and situation of the house spoke of wealth—so did the carriage and dress of its mistress and the number and orderliness of her servants—so did the interior arrangements and furniture. They all spoke of wealth—but of wealth not long possessed—of wealth that had not come by inheritance: everything was terribly fresh—there was the glitter of recently-made gold about it all.

It was nearly six o'clock when Mrs. Sutton walked into her house, and after looking at the cards and letters on the hall table, and selecting three or four of the latter for private perusal, asked if the master was come home yet? On being told yes, she went on to a room behind the hall, and into the presence of her husband.

He was lying back in a large arm-chair before the fire when she entered, but he got up at her approach, and pushed it back a little, for her to take a lower and more comfortable one by his side. Standing up and smiling a welcome to a woman whom he worshiped, Mr. Sutton was seen at his best. What that best was shall be told briefly.

He was a short, thick-set man, with a large, fat, florid face, surmounted by a quantity of smoothly-brushed straight, yellow-brown hair. His forehead was broad and strong over the brows, and his eyes were of a cool, steady gray, that would have betokened something like fixedness of purpose and strength of will had they not been contradicted by the loose expression of a large, unwieldy mouth. He had been many things before he became a successful speculator. But under every phase he himself truthfully averred that he had never been mean or dishonorable; and Marian added that he never had been and never would be a gentleman.

Indeed, at the first glance, all the conditions which must be fulfilled before a man has a right to that proudest word of all, "gentleman," stamped upon him, were wanting in Mark Sutton. The son of a small country-town tradesman, without a classical education, the trick of manner, or the gracious gift of a good appearance, he belonged clearly and unalterably to the people. Yet for all that he had worked his way up to dine with princes (only at civic feasts, certainly), and to be the husband of a beautiful, refined, well-bred woman, who never suffered him to forget that she was a Talbot.

"Well, my Marian!" he said, taking her hand kindly, as she seated herself. "You have been to your sister; what do you think of the stranger?"

It was a habit of his to put what he knew to be the case in the form of an assertion to his wife when questioning her about her daily path. If he seemed to be sure of a thing Marian was under less temptation to tell a story about it. Under "less temptation," but still not entirely free from it. For the fascination of falsehood was strongly upon Mrs. Sutton, and she rarely told the truth—never when she could avoid doing so.

"Yes; I have been with her at Edgar's all the time, Mark," she answered, brightly. "She is very pretty now. When I have polished her up a little she will be very perfect. I gave up my whole afternoon to her, instead of going to Hortense, as I intended."

"I have seen Edgar this afternoon; he seems to have made very considerate plans for his sister's comfort."

Mrs. Sutton shrugged her shoulders, and went away to dress for dinner soon after that.

It was not late—only about half-past nine o'clock—when the lady was aroused from the corner of the little couch on which she had settled herself by the announcement of "Mr. Lionel Talbot and Mr. Bathurst."

Frank Bathurst was the last person in the world who would have been selected, by people who are not fond of pairing others according to their own tastes, as the friend of Lionel Talbot. It is true that they both loved the same things; but they loved in such a widely different way that the manner of their worship ought to have sundered their souls more effectually than if each had bent before another shrine, and was a bigot about every other form of faith. Frank Bathurst had been left lord of himself and ten thousand a year when he was only nineteen, and, in defiance of the bard's opinion to the contrary, he had not found it a heritage of woe. He was a painter and a musician, and he spread out the power his money gave him in all directions, like a polypus, in order to find the means to further the aim he had; namely, to attain perfection and gain a name in both these arts. He had birth and place; he was known as a man of fashion and cultivation—his good looks were a sure passport to the favor of every man and woman on whom he turned his handsome face; and it was not enough for him. He sighed to write some notes that should thrill some

world where Verdi was not cherished—to paint a picture that should tell some noble story: nobly to do something good, and grand, and, above all, true. The two men had cast in their lots together for a while, and were working in a studio in Frank Bathurst's house, in the bright Bayswater air; working unremittingly each after his kind: Bathurst at a great picture that absorbed him—"The Battle of the Bards"—a picture into which he had "thrown all his strength," he firmly believed, and which he loved and looked forward to as to a thing that should make him of great account honestly in the realms of art; and Lionel Talbot at a small piece of canvas—small, at least, in comparison with that which Frank was covering with frightened beauties and frantic bards—on which was represented waves in half a gale of wind, with the moonlight on them. He had learned to know and love his model well down on the wild Cornish coast—the beauty of it had gone into his soul. So he painted it, without giving a thought to

the contemptuous overlooking it would be sure to receive at the eyes of the eager votaries of art on the first of May.

It was the first time Mrs. Sutton had seen the man whom she emphatically declared to be Lionel's only respectable friend. She had persuaded her brother to bring Mr. Bathurst, under a promise of showing him a certain quaint old line engraving of some scene of courtly confusion, which seemed to have much in common with the one Mr. Bathurst was trying to depict from "Tannhauser."

And so they had come, as has been seen, and the engraving proved, on inspection, to be a snare and a delusion, as far as the faintest possible resemblance between it and the grouping of Mr. Bathurst's picture was concerned. But, as she said, her "stupid mistake promised to be the basis of an agreeable acquaintance," for Mr. Bathurst pledged himself to make one of the family party which was to dine at Mr. Sutton's the following day. "Only a quiet little dinner, given in honor of the return among us of my sister, Miss Talbot," she explained. And even while she was saying it she made up her mind that she would not do as she had intended doing before she knew that Mr. Bathurst would be with them—go around to Victoria Street in the morning, and suggest a charming toilette for Trixy, in order that Trixy might tell Edgar how considerate Marian was, and possibly induce Edgar to feel that he had been unwise in not trusting Miss Talbot's future in her married sister's hands.

But it is time that Miss Lyon should come forward.

CHAPTER IV.

BLANCHE.

"DENBIGH STREET, Belgravia," was the address which Mrs. Lyon gave to all such correspondents as she desired to hear from. Her letters would have reached her a post or two sooner had she surrendered the truth, and permitted "Pimlico" to appear on the envelopes. But "Belgravia" looked better, and Mrs. Lyon saw great cause for studying the look of things still.

"Denbigh Street, Belgravia, is my temporary abode, while my daughter is staying in the country," she had been saying in reply to all inquiries as to either her house or her child during the last six months. But now Blanche was coming back to her, a change was about to be made; and Mrs. Lyon was glancing forward hopefully to a time when lodgings and difficulties about dinners—an overwhelming sense of utter inability to keep "litter" in the background—and "herself" should be on less familiar terms.

Miss Lyon was expected home to dinner. She was to arrive in town a few days after Miss Talbot, and to be told on her arrival of the plans that had been formed for Miss Talbot's welfare. Mrs. Lyon was to be the communicant; and Mrs. Lyon, at the moment of her introduction into these pages, was looking forward tremblingly to her task.

She was a middle-aged, neutral-tinted woman, who had always found herself less well placed in the world than she had confidently expected to be, and who yet, withal, had never expected much. She had gone through life obeying mild impulses that invariably tended to convey her further from fortune and all the delights appertaining thereto than she had been before. Yet all her reverses, all her never-ending declinings upon some position still lower than the one she had before occupied, had been powerless to wrinkle her brow, or deepen the lines round the softly-moulded lips that had never been known to utter a severe or a sensible sentence.

The nearest approach to a frown that her brows had ever known was upon them now, as she sat between the table and the fire-place, awaiting her daughter's advent. She was sorely perplexed and annoyed about two or three things. The chief one was a message that had been brought up wordily from the kitchen to the effect that if Mrs. Lyon did not have her chicken up now that it was ready, it would be burned to a cinder.

"It may be brought up the instant Miss Lyon arrives—not before," she had answered, almost deprecatingly; and then she had gone on to explain to the servant, whose usual manner was one of insolence, tastefully enlivened by familiarity, that, "Now Miss Lyon was coming, things must be different: they really must, for Miss Lyon was most particular."

Presently Miss Lyon came. She was heard giving directions about her luggage in the hall; then she came running up stairs, and her mother advanced half way to the door to meet her, and then fell back to alter the situation of a salt-cellar, and then faltered forward again, and finally involved herself with the door-handle just as Blanche was coming into the room: involved herself in such a way that some lace on her sleeve caught in the key, and brought it to the floor with a clatter that bewildered her, and prevented her seeing Blanche's outstretched hand, and face bent down to kiss her.

While Mrs. Lyon was extricating herself, and explaining how it came to pass that the key should have fallen at this juncture, and calling to "hasten dinner" in a tone that was unintentionally petulant by reason of her anxiety to make her daughter comfortable at once, Blanche swept on into the full light of the lamp, and stood by the fire, looking half impatiently, half laughingly, upon the confusion her entrance had caused.

The light of the lamp had never fallen on a brighter beauty than this one. She had a face that was flashing, thoughtful, cloudy, smiling, in such rapid succession that it appeared to be at once. No expression had a long life in her eyes, no smile, and no reason for it, more than a temporary abode on her lip and in her heart. There was about her that magic of luminous darkness which characterized Edgar Allan Poe's genius. The sheen on each wave of her lustrous ruddy-tipped dark hair; the quick dilating pupil of her great black-lashed eyes; the line that came from nervous agitation.

or anxious thought across her rather low, square, clever brow; the quick, clear tones that never lost their cultivation; the lithe movement that was never lounging; the rapid gesture that was always refined—all spoke of suppressed fire—all made one marvel at her being the daughter of her mother.

Rounded, but fine-drawn in figure, lacking in those large proportions which made Beatrix Talbot such a glorious type of woman, but with a grace that was all her own, and that was inferior to none; a grace that clothed each action, making it seem the fitting thing to do; a grace that came from perfect proportion, and from an artistic appreciation of all the power perfect proportion gives. A woman—in a word—possessed of that most “gorgeous cloak for all deficiencies”—an inimitable manner.

How splendidly she stood the test of the strong light after the long day's travel! Standing there, her hands in her muff still; her hat on her head; one well-bred, high-instepped little foot lifted up to the top bar, to the detriment of the shapely boot that covered it; her long drapery falling away in graceful folds; and her little delicately-pointed nose and chin held aloft in laughing contempt for the chaos she had created—Blanche looked well worth any man's love, and any woman's envy.

Blanche had come home charged with good resolutions. Among others, she was not going to suffer impatience to obtain for one minute in her heart against the weak one who should have been her support, and who in all things had to lean upon her. Additionally, she was going to spend the three or four months' holiday she meant to take in learning some language or accomplishment which should fit her to take some better situation than she had hitherto held. The consciousness of being fraught with good intentions came to her aid happily, and tided her over the irritating half hour of confusion, complaining, and explanation which succeeded her advent. Mrs. Lyon was a woman utterly incapable of letting a fact speak for itself. The dinner was late—the dinner is apt to be very late where unceasing fuss and one female servant reign alone. Blanche could have borne this with composure, as she had not set her hopes on dining the moment she arrived. What she found hard to bear was being told it was late, and why it was late—a stream of narration which was swollen continually by many way-side springs of explanation concerning all the nouns incidentally mentioned. It was hard, very hard indeed, for the girl who had a good heavy weight upon her, made up of many things, to listen patiently to the tale of the green grocer's laxity, the butcher-boy's peccadilloes, and the servant's general iniquities.

“I do not mind for myself,” Mrs. Lyon wound up with, when the wearied Blanche drew a quick breath that was as much of a sigh as a sensible woman can ever permit herself to heave, and this not of impatience at any of the ills to which the livers on narrow incomes are heir, but at the manner of their recital—“I do not mind for myself; I never expect to be anything but worried and uncomfortable; but I wish to make your home pleasant to you.”

“Then, mother, let me do all the fault-finding, Blanche answered, brightly. “You sit down and take things easy.”

“Ah!” Mrs. Lyon said, shaking her head, and rising up laboriously to move two or three things that might with perfect propriety have remained where they were, “it's easy to talk; your poor dear father always spoke as if regulating a household, and having things nice and comfortable, was no more trouble than taking a walk.”

“But you don't have things nice and comfortable, with all the fuss you make.” Blanche only thought this sentence, she did not say it. All she said was, “I dare say you are right, mamma; but comfort is a most uncomfortable thing.” Then she took off her hat and threw it back on the side-board (when Mrs. Lyon followed it as if it might have done some damage to the normal decorations of that piece of furniture, if it were not carefully supervised), and then she threw off a good deal of the brightness with which she had come into the room, and sat down rather sadly, under the conviction that her good resolutions would be utterly routed before long.

“I am sure, the day I have had!—not a moment to call my own since I got out of bed, Blanche!” Mrs. Lyon commenced, piteously, when the chicken made its appearance at last, and the two ladies sat down to dinner.

“How happy you must have been!” Blanche answered, with most injudicious truthfulness. It was a fact that Mrs. Lyon never was so easy in her mind as when she was actively employed in contributing to confusion; but it was a fact the mention of which she always resented.

“Happy!” she echoed, pausing in her employment about the toughest part of the wing. “Happy! it is very little happiness I have known in life, Blanche—very little, as I have told your poor dear father over and over again.”

“What a comfort it must have been to my father to hear you say so!” Blanche had remembered her good resolutions by this time; so, though she could not resist making the speech, she made it in her lightest, pleasantest manner.

“I am afraid he cared very little about it,” Mrs. Lyon replied, pathetically. Then she shed a tear or two, and had to stop to chase them down her cheeks and dry them before they escaped. Meanwhile the chicken grew cold, and Blanche had time to wonder whether it had been quite worth while to spend the whole day in designing and striving after a consummation that was suffered to spoil when achieved.

“Tell me some of the things you have been busy about, mamma,” Blanche asked, hastily. And then Mrs. Lyon entered upon a narrative that reminded her daughter of the famous brook, in that it bid fair to go on “forever.” A narrative that wound round and round

the original subject which it had professed to treat of at starting, cleverly avoiding that, and embracing instead a variety of topics that had no connection whatever with anything about which Blanche ever had heard, or ever could desire to hear.

The truth was that Mrs. Lyon was striving to brace herself for the leap she had promised Edgar Talbot to rise at by taking a conversational preliminary canter. She rather dreaded the look the announcement might call into life in her daughter's great, gray, honest eyes. More, she rather dreaded a definite refusal on Blanche's part to accompany her to Mr. Talbot's house, there to play the part of social guardian-angel to Mr. Talbot's sister.

Mrs. Lyon broke the tidings in what she conceived to be a singularly diplomatic way. She waited till Blanche (tired out with her journey and several hours' hard hunting after her mother's meaning, which had been, as usual, sedulously concealed in many words) went up to her own room and prepared to go to bed.

To bed, but not to sleep; for Mrs. Lyon followed her with a glass of warm sherry and water—a beverage with which Blanche was unsympathetic, the mere sight and faint odor of which brought back memories of childish illnesses and general debility. Mrs. Lyon followed her with this draught and the words:

“My dear Blanche, what do you think of this plan of Mr. Talbot's?” laying a slight stress on the words “what do you think,” as if the matter had been before Blanche for some time, and had been a subject of free discussion between Mrs. Lyon and others.

“Mr. Talbot!—Mrs. Sutton's brother? I don't think I remember any plan of his,” Blanche replied, raising herself up, and leaning on her elbow.

“Then I may as well tell you to-night, to give you something pleasant to dream about,” the elder lady rejoined, with a little affected air of jocularity that was very pitiable. Then she went on to tell what Mr. Talbot had thought, and she had thought first; and then what each of them had said to the other, and then what each had thought the other would think, and then what both had said what Blanche would think, until she swam away into a haven of satisfaction out of the dangerous difficulties of the ocean of words she herself had created. “There now, go to sleep and dream about it, and ask no questions until the morning,” she interrupted, rather querulously when Blanche began, “But, mamma.” The interruption fell on deaf ears, however; Blanche would not go to sleep and dream about it just yet.

“To manage Mr. Talbot's house and his sister! What is his sister? an infant or an idiot?”

“Really, Blanche, no one, to hear you, would believe how careful I always have been in my own language. Choice! I was considered quite choice in my expressions when I was a girl; and I am sure for years after my marriage your father never heard me say a word that the whole world might not have heard.”

“I dare say not, poor papa!” the girl cried, with petulant irreverence. “Never mind my bad language to-night, though, mother; tell me more of this plan; tell me something I can hear with patience; tell me, you have not agreed to put yourself and me in the position of servants in Mr. Talbot's house.”

She spoke fast and earnestly. Her mother, in describing the tones Blanche used on the occasion, afterwards, to the sympathizing Mrs. Sutton, denominated them “fierce.”

“I am to be Miss Talbot's chaperon.”

Blanche laughed out merrily. The absurdity would touch herself, she knew; still she could not help seeing the humor of it all, and laughing at it for the time.

“And I—what am I to be?” she inquired.

“You are to be Miss Talbot's companion—treated quite like her sister; and, really, Blanche, I do not see that a companion is so much lower than a governess,” Mrs. Lyon added, hurriedly. Then she went on to cry a little, and to say that this was a prospect that opened up something like peace, and comfort, and security to her—things (she would mention incidentally) which had hitherto been denied to her. But of course she should have to give them up, and go on living the life of privation, not to say misery, for which she had been expressly born!

Then Blanche had to perform a humiliating task; to argue against her own judgment, for the sake of rescuing her mother from the watery abyss over which the latter insisted on hovering. She reminded herself that she was not sure of being able to do better for Mrs. Lyon than Mrs. Lyon proposed doing for herself, and she sedulously strove to cultivate the feeling that it was unworthy of her to imagine that there would be any degradation in going in a subordinate position to the house of Mrs. Sutton's brother. The mere thought of her fair, insolent, skilful antagonist brought her worst qualities vigorously to the surface. “If she does not keep the peace from the first—from the very first—keep it fairly, and never try to deal me a foul blow, I will strike—and wound her, too,” she thought, as she turned her hot, throbbing brow from the light, and pressed it into the pillow, when at last her mother left her alone—but not to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAMILY PARTY.

MRS. SUTTON had certainly not neglected one of the primary duties of woman on the night of the family dinner party to which she had invited Mr. Bathurst. She was looking her best; there had been no counting the cost in the creation of the rich costume that seemed only a fitting finish to her prettiness—it was so perfect in its unobtrusiveness. Having abstained, as may be remembered, from going to offer Beatrix a hint on the subject of her dress, she was rather disappointed to find, on Beatrix's entrance, that the hint would have

been superfluous, Miss Talbot having dressed the situation capitally. Securely as Mrs. Sutton stood in the center of her own draperies, she did feel her heart hardening against the younger sister, who, coming straight from the wilds of the country, dare not alone to know what to wear, but how to wear it.

She banished the sharp expression of savage jealousy before Beatrix had time to see that it was more than a welcoming smile—banished it, and substituted one of young matronly dignity, that sat very gracefully upon her almost girlish beauty, Frank Bathurst thought. During the first ten minutes of being with the two sisters Mr. Bathurst made many profound and original observations to himself on the superiority of perfect tact, grace, and style over mere “perfect beauty,” as shown in the favorable contrast Mrs. Sutton offered to her younger sister. It did not occur to him at the time that the contrast might not have been so markedly in favor of the married woman had she not happened to be apparently absorbed in something he himself was saying to her. When he mentioned afterward to Lionel that “Mrs. Sutton talked well,” Lionel knew enough of his friend and his sister to feel certain that the latter had listened admiringly.

But when they got themselves seated around the dinner-table, the inferiority of perfect beauty was less patent to Mr. Frank Bathurst. He saw that there was a touch of nobility about the girl opposite to him which her pretty married sister lacked. Beatrix had not a vivacious face, but she had a face that was capable of very intense expression, and this capability made itself manifest to the artist at a very early stage of the dinner, and brought him very much under her banner, though he was ignorant of the cause that called forth that intensity.

“Trix finds the room too hot; she is quite flushed,” said Mrs. Sutton. “Take my advice, Edgar, and have a nice perforated oak screen put up in your room before you begin giving dinners. When do the Lyons come to you?”

The diversion was perfect. Mr. Bathurst ceased in an instant to admire Miss Talbot's expression, and to ponder over what could have called it into being.

“The Lyons,” he repeated, addressing Mr. Talbot; “do you know any Lyons?”

“I know a Mrs. Lyon and her daughter,” Edgar replied rather stiffly. He exceedingly disliked having to offer up explanations concerning his relations with the Lyons to chance questioners.

“We all know Mrs. Lyon and her daughter,” Mrs. Sutton went on to explain, “and we are all very much at the feet of Mrs. Lyon and her daughter, are we not, Mark?”

“I am more than rather interested. I have some cousins—distant cousins—of the name of Lyon. Is Miss Lyon called Blanche?”

“Yes, the children used to call her Blanche sometimes,” Mrs. Sutton replied.

“Children—what children?”

“The children where she was governess,” Mrs. Sutton said quietly. And something in her tone brought the blood to the brows of the two men to whom Blanche was nearest, the one through his love for, the other through his relationship to her. Frank Bathurst was the first to speak.

“She went out as a governess, did she? A high-spirited girl, as she ought to be, coming of that stock.”

As soon as the two sisters found themselves alone in the drawing-room, Mrs. Sutton realized that she must talk very fast and very forcibly in order to keep Trix from uttering the reproachful words she was evidently burning to utter. She had no distrust of her own powers of managing to avoid hearing unpleasant things. A few minutes spent in saying pretty things fluently, then a few minutes' sleep, or assumption of it, and then the men would come in, and “decent sisterly feeling would prevent Trix” speaking. Mrs. Sutton was great about many things, but perhaps she was greatest of all about the moral and social responsibilities of others.

Accordingly she commenced at once, while wheeling one little couch round nearer to the fire, to make “Trix” comfortable, and pushing another back into her own pet corner, where were low seats for satellites.

“Very good-looking Damon and Pythias are.”

“You mean Lionel and his friend?” Trix asked.

“Yes, of course I do. What a fortunate thing it is for us all that Lionel did not go into the bondage of an artistic friendship with one of the many untidy and poor young men who paint, and whose name is legion!”

Marian paused, and Trix was on the point of saying a word as to the possibility of the untidy and poor young men being not utterly devoid of merit. A moment's consideration saved her from the error. Marian had not impugned their merit; she had only said it was a comfort to the family that Lionel had not formed a friendship for one of them. Probably she was right.

“It is an immense satisfaction to me that he is what he is,” Marian went on. “I am far too fond of my brothers,” she added, piously, “not to feel it my duty to see a great deal of them; a married sister can be of such immense service to a young man, can she not?”

The climax was weak. Beatrix had been feeling her painful inferiority and utter uselessness as an “unmarried sister,” but she was partially restored by the appeal.

“I have no doubt that she can, and that you are, Marian,” she replied, laughing. “Do your good offices extend to their friends?”

“When their friends are like Mr. Bathurst, and I have a beautiful sister, who is still Miss Talbot, near me, yes. The story tells itself, without trouble, Trix; my experience of men with those heavenly blue eyes is, that they fall in love with every lovable earthly creature they meet.”

Among other girlish attributes Miss Talbot had a fair sense of her own importance. She did not hold it absolutely necessary that other lips and other hearts should

have played no part in the past of the one who might hope to win her in the present. She did not hold this absolutely necessary. At the same time, it would be a first condition with her that she should reign, and reign alone. So now she said :

" My experience of men with heavenly blue eyes is yet to be gained, and will not be from Mr. Bathurst."

" I have heard those decisions against a man's suit, before it has been proffered, made before to-day, Trixy," Mrs. Sutton said, in her most dulcet accents, stretching her feet out so that the dainty silk shoes, with their big rosettes, just escaped below her robe. " Don't determine too resolutely against Frank Bathurst; his eyes will upset your strongest resolutions, if he ever brings them to bear upon you."

" I will give him up to Miss Lyon, she has the prior claim," Trixy, said laughing. And then Mrs. Sutton sat up and pushed her brown hair back off her forehead, and suffered her eyes to scintillate.

" You will be weak—weak is no word for it—you will be foolish and wrong to the last degree, if you suffer that girl to be in Edgar's house for a week, Trixy; she will marry him and lead him like a blind dog!"

" And if she does?"

" If she does—you ask it coolly enough now; but take my word for it, you will know the reason why it would be better she should not, before she has been his wife a month. She is artful, designing, unscrupulous, and clever."

Mrs. Sutton spoke fast and forcibly, but neither loudly or coarsely. She panted out her denunciation of Miss Lyon much as a silver bell might " ring out" the falseness of the epoch with its tinkling chimes. In the face of the knowledge she had that Marian could diverge from the truth to suit her own convenience, without effort or scruple, and despite her brother Edgar's caution on the subject, Beatrix was conscious of being considerably carried by the fascinating homilist on the sofa.

" You know something to her disadvantage, Marian?—you could not be so bitter against this girl for nothing," Trixy asked, unguardedly. And Mrs. Sutton said to herself, " I wish I did," and to her sister :

" I know nothing; but I have my instincts—a pure woman's instincts seldom mislead, Trixy," she continued, with a brilliant rapid assumption of the best British matron manner. Then they had to cease from the subject, for Lionel and Mr. Bathurst came in to ask if they might take their coffee there.

The pure woman, whose instincts seldom misled her, thought it well, on the whole, since she desired to stand highly with Frank Bathurst, to devote herself a good deal to her almost stranger brother this evening. There was a good deal about Lionel that was very interesting to most women. He was intelligent, with a bright surface intelligence that does not always—or often—go with the deeper, more intense aesthetic feeling for appreciation of, and proficiency in, art or literature. Further, he was good-looking, fine, well-grown, and graceful. There was no need for him to be ticketed—no woman seen with him would feel called upon to give a hasty explanation respecting him. She would rather take pride in waiting and hearing the speculations to which his appearance gave rise, since all of them were flattering.

If there was a good deal that was interesting to women generally about Mr. Lionel Talbot, the young, already well-reputed artist, there was even more that was particularly interesting to his sister, Mrs. Sutton. She saw in him a good, strong, legitimate stepping-stone to a higher place in the social scale for herself.

She saw that he was made of more ductile materials than Edgar; moreover, he knew less about her, and was more likely, therefore, to come under her influence. If only he succeeded brilliantly, she would attach herself to, and identify herself very much with him. In pursuance of this idea, she told him she was sorry he had established himself with Mr. Bathurst at Bayswater. " You could have had a capital studio here, Lionel, and I could have peeped in on you sometimes, without feeling that I was interrupting Mr. Bathurst," she urged, in reference to her proposition.

" You can do that now, Marian; the 'Battle of the Bards' doesn't occupy much of his time just at present; he has got an idea of another subject from the same poem in his head—Venus herself luring Tannhauser up the fatal mountain; so he is letting himself lie fallow until he can meet with a model for Venus."

" I wonder if he will find one," Mrs. Sutton replied, looking round toward the man under discussion and her sister. The latter looked fair enough to be a model for the goddess of beauty at the moment. The notion that Frank Bathurst might think her so, and perhaps let it be known that he thought so, to the overthrowing of Mrs. Sutton's claims to be first always, roused all the sleeping tigress vanity that was always there, even if couchant, in Marian's character.

" I was looking at Trixy, hoping that she would do," she said, carelessly turning toward Lionel again; " she has good features—perfect, I suppose they may be called—and nice violet eyes; but she is no Venus."

" Bathurst will not readily find a better type."

" It's a very usual English type, however," Mrs. Sutton pursued. She could not bear that her own brother should admire her own sister. " A very usual English type—fine and fleshy, and wide-eyed; more a Juno than a Venus, isn't she, Mark?"

Mr. Sutton, who had just come in with Edgar Talbot, seated himself by his wife before he answered:

" I am not sure that my ideas about the respective goddesses are very clear; what is the question?"

" Mr. Bathurst wants a face to paint Venus from; Trixy will not do?"

" No; but his cousin, Miss Lyon, will," Edgar Talbot exclaimed. Then he felt annoyed with himself for saying it, or thinking it; and more horribly annoyed still at the fact of the relationship rising to his recollection. " That mother of hers will harass Blanche into marrying the fellow," he thought, angrily; and then he de-

termined that he would tell Lionel to keep his friend away from his (Edgar's) house on Trixy's account. " It will never do to give him the freedom of the place; Lionel will quite understand that," he said to himself. Yet it did not give him any great uneasiness to see that already Trixy and Mr. Frank Bathurst were talking a duet, apparently very much to their own satisfaction.

" My experience of men with those heavenly blue eyes is, that they fall in love with every lovable earthly creature they meet." Trixy remembered her sister's words, as Mr. Bathurst looked at her while telling her some art story, until he grew confused in the telling. Trixy was not sure that she hoped her sister's experience might be exceptional; but she was sure that Frank Bathurst's eyes were of the most heavenly blue.

CHAPTER VI.

KIN AND KIND.

A few days after, Mrs. and Miss Lyon, at Mr. and Miss Talbot's earnest request, took up their abode in Victoria street, and now the interest of this story commences in the meeting of Blanche and Beatrix—the two women who were born to cross each other's paths, to pain and injure one another—to whose introduction to each other all that has been written has been but a preliminary strain.

Mrs. Sutton had blandly volunteered to come herself and to bring her husband and Lionel to spend the first evening, and to obviate anything like awkwardness. She had made the offer to Beatrix in a sweet, considerate way, that won Beatrix's immediate acceptance of it. Miss Talbot had her reward when the time arrived, and with it Mrs. Sutton, for Mr. Bathurst accompanied them, and Mr. Bathurst had in the course of a few meetings recommended himself largely to Trixy. The one drawback she permitted herself to feel to the pleasure of his society on this occasion was, that Edgar was palpably a touch less than pleased to see Frank Bathurst. Trixy would not permit herself to search for a reason for this almost imperceptible shade of difference; indeed, she resolutely looked away from it when it intruded itself upon her notice. Sutton was less scrupulous.

" Let us hope that the kinship is a well-established fact, for they certainly seem more than kind to each other," she whispered to Beatrix, while Frank Bathurst was pouring out a plaintive, low-toned reproach to Miss Lyon for not having replied to his advances toward a good understanding long ago. And Beatrix replied :

" And why should they not be more than kind, Marian? I know of no reason;" and ached to know that there was no reason, so far as she was herself concerned, and checked a little sigh at the speedy seeming defalcation of this man whom she had only known the other day, and tried to think " what a well-matched pair they would be," and could not heartily approve them nevertheless.

They were a very handsome, bright pair—a pair that took to each other joyously and suddenly, causing Mrs. Lyon to undergo most wonderful transitions of feeling as she marked them. Mr. Talbot became a mere nothing in her estimation, and Frank Bathurst stood revealed at once as the fitting and proper man, foredoomed by nature and old Mr. Lyon to marry her daughter. She almost deported herself haughtily to the Talbots under the influence of this conviction, and judiciously murmured her belief in its being a well-founded fact into Trixy Talbot's ear.

So it came to pass that more than one heart ached and beat high and painfully beneath Edgar Talbot's roof that night, after they had separated on the agreement of all meeting at Frank Bathurst's studio the following day.

No attempt has been made to depict what were the prevailing sensations of Miss Talbot and Blanche Lyon on this their first meeting. The external aspect was fair and pleasant enough, for they were both gracious-mannered women, with a good deal of cultivation super-added to their innate refinement; and it would have jarred upon their tastes to show other than a very smooth social surface. But they did not conceive and instantly develop a devoted attachment and enthusiastic admiration for one another. To a certain degree Beatrix Talbot was in the place of power, and the half-consciousness that she was this may have been the cause of the shade of restraint which made itself manifest in her demeanor two or three times—a shade which she strove to dispel quickly in her sunniest way, but which remained long enough for Mrs. Sutton to remark it, and to fathom the cause of it to a certain extent.

" There is a something very incongruous between Miss Lyon's position and her cousin; to which do you think her best adapted?" the married sister kindly asked Beatrix; and Beatrix replied :

" I won't indulge in vague speculations about her;" and then immediately added, " there is something incongruous in Mr. Bathurst's cousin being about in the world in this way; it must strike them both painfully."

" No, pleasurable rather; he is at once patronizing and adoring, lord and lover—King Cophetua on a small scale—and a gratified artist. Poor Trixy! your reign is over."

" It never commenced."

" Indeed it did, and was not altogether inglorious; traces of your rule are to be seen in his studio; he has sketched you in for his Venus, and I don't think Miss Lyon will succeed you there, for he would have so much trouble in idealizing her nose into proper proportion that he would weary of that type sooner than yours. We will ask Lionel what he thinks about it. Lionel!"

Lionel came at her call, and listened to her remarks, and then declared himself incapable of throwing any light on his friend's final election either in the matter of Venus or anything else. In reply to Mrs. Sutton's

inquiry, " Should you say he is a marrying man, Lionel?" Lionel answered, " No, indeed; any more than I should say he is not a marrying man."

" Should you like him to marry Beatrix?" She whispered this eagerly, cutting Beatrix out of the conversation by the low tone she used. Lionel's reply was made in an equally low tone.

" No, certainly not."

" Then you know something about him—something against him?"

" About him, yes; against him, not a breath."

" If he does not marry Trixy he will that Miss Lyon, mark my words."

Lionel turned his head and looked at the pair mentioned. " That would be better far," he said.

" Why so? you do know something against him, Lionel!"

" I only know that he has the germs of inconstancy in him; the latest thing is apt to be the best in his eyes. If the shadow of a change fell, Miss Lyon would either arrest it or be entirely uninfluenced by it. I am not so sure of Beatrix."

" Then you'll all come to our studio to-morrow?" Mr. Bathurst exclaimed, interrupting the conversation at this juncture by coming up to them. " Miss Lyon refuses to be considered an art enthusiast, but she is good enough to be interested in my works. What time will you come?"

" Shall it be two?" Mrs. Sutton suggested.

" It shall be two, and it shall be luncheon," Mr. Bathurst replied. And then Blanche joined them, and recommenced the old game of self-assertion, by saying :

" Until I know whether or not the plan suits my mother I can say nothing."

" Nor I, of course," Beatrix put in, hurriedly.

" You can go with me," Mrs. Sutton said, with a well-marked emphasis on the " you," which completely excluded Blanche from the proposed arrangement.

" Thanks; but Mrs. Lyon will order my goings now, Marian," Trixy replied, with a humility she would not have expressed if her sister had not offered a slight to Blanche. Then Mrs. Lyon rejoined them with some knitting which had been specially designed for this evening's employment, toward which end it had been carefully put away in the most remote corner of her largest trunk. She was acquiescent and anxious to oblige everyone on the plan being mooted to her, and then she was assailed by maddening doubts as to her being wanted. " Young people liked being by themselves," she observed; and then at once proceeded to qualify that statement by declaring that she " should not think of letting Miss Talbot and Blanche go alone, not for a moment."

" Then it is settled, mamma, we go at two?" Blanche said, hastily.

" If that hour suits Mr. Talbot and Mr. Bathurst. Mrs. Lyon was painfully anxious to propitiate everyone.

" That is all understood," Blanche explained; and then they parted, Mrs. Sutton whispering to her sister as she took leave, " Your duenna is a delightful person; your position will be a touch less ridiculous than her daughter's—there is consolation in that."

" Thanks for offering it," Trixy replied, wearily. Then she had to give her hand to Mr. Bathurst.

" You will see to-morrow what cause I have to be grateful to you, Miss Talbot," he said, as her great violet eyes met his rather reproachfully; and she could think of nothing more brilliant to reply than " Shall I indeed?"

" Yes, indeed you will; and I owe you another debt: you are the cause of my knowing my cousin at last."

" Ah! good-night!" Trixy evidently wanted no verbal reward for this good deed; she turned away almost impatiently from his thanks to say " good-by" to her brother.

Presently, for the first time that evening, Miss Lyon found herself near to Lionel Talbot.

" May we see your picture, too?" she asked.

" I shall have great pleasure in showing it to you." She laughed and shook her head.

" No, no—neither pleasure nor reluctance, nor any other active feeling. You won't care a bit what we think—and you will be so right." She dropped her voice suddenly in uttering the last words; they fell upon his ears alone.

He felt that he could not conscientiously say that he should be very much interested as to what they thought of his work; therefore he did not answer her for a few moments. During those few moments a slight transition took place in his mind respecting his interlocutor, and so he told her, honestly enough, that he should care for her opinion: " and you will give it to me, and me alone, will you not?" he added, earnestly.

" So be it," she said, lightly. " I have given the same promise to my cousin. I should give the same promise to a dozen men, if they asked me—and probably break it."

She looked up questioningly into his face as she put the probability before him.

" As far as I am concerned you will keep it?"

" I think I shall."

" I know you will."

" And you will not care whether I do or not. Praise or blame, it's all alike to you, Mr. Bathurst says."

" And as a rule he is right," Lionel replied, laughing; and Blanche felt for a moment that it would be pleasant to be the exceptionally regarded one.

CHAPTER VII.

It will be easily understood that the plan of visiting the studio was a specially obnoxious one to Edgar Talbot. He was strongly moved once or twice to set his face against Beatrix's going, and, by so doing, putting an end to the arrangement. But he remembered that if he did this it would be usurping some of the authority over his sister which he had formerly vested in Mrs.

Lyon. In his heart he called that lady a weak-minded, unreasoning, injudicious simpleton, for her ready acceptance of the invitation; and the full force of his own transparent folly in having given her the reins came flooding in upon his mind. But for the time, at least, he was bound to pluck what he had planted, bitterly as it pricked him. The authority he had vested in a foolish woman must be upheld by him for his own credit's sake, until Blanche married him or marred him by marrying some one else. He was quite resolved now, nothing but her own will should stand between them. So, out of consideration for his own reputation of consistency, Edgar Talbot placed no obstruction in their path to the studio the following day. Nevertheless they did not reach it until an hour after the appointed time, divers unforeseen accidents and events having occurred to delay them.

"By-the-way, I left my model when I came to meet you," Frank Bathurst said to Miss Lyon, as, with her by his side, he led the way to his studio. Then he went on to tell her what a wonderful effect Lionel had succeeded in producing with the representation of waves alone. "He's by way of being a genius: there's not a boat, or a gull, or a light-house, or anything but water on his canvas; and still you get pulled up before it."

When he paid that tribute to his friend's talent Blanche felt that there must be an immense deal in Frank Bathurst. She rendered up her hand to him with delightful readiness, as he offered to help her over the threshold, and then down the flight of steps which came between the back and front part of his studio; and she spoke out her admiration for his "Battle of the Bards" with hearty eloquence when they paused before it.

"Now I want to show Miss Talbot something," he exclaimed, impatiently, as he saw Beatrix walking on with her brother; "I hope that fellow won't point it out to her first."

"Go and stop his doing so," Blanche said, quickly. And Mr. Bathurst took her advice; and presently Lionel Talbot came and joined Miss Lyon, leaving his sister very happy by the act.

"There is a good deal of spirit in that," Blanche said, waving her hand at large toward the huge canvas whereon "Tannhauser" was depicted, in the midst of a well-dressed mob, giving vent to the defiance:

"Grim bards of love who nothing know,
Now ends the unequal fight between us;
Dare as I dared! to Horsel go,
And taste love on the lips of Venus."

"A great deal of spirit," she repeated, feeling at the moment utterly unable to offer any other art criticism.

"Yes," he replied, "I wish Bathurst would work at it, instead of wasting his time on the other one."

"What is the other one?"

"Come in and see it."

"No, no," she said, as she glanced in the direction he would have taken, and saw her mother in mid-distance, and Miss Talbot and Mr. Bathurst further on: "I want to see yours first."

"Then come and look at it." And he led her to the other end of the long studio; and they stood alone before the waves that had steeped his mind in admiration for their wild beauty long ago on the Cornish coast.

She stood in silence for a while, not only averse to, but incapable now of offering an opinion, respecting the painting the more for his being the painter of it, and the painter the more for the painting being his. Letting her admiration for both react upon each other, in fact, with a subtlety that women often employ in like cases.

"What are you going to call it?" she asked, at length, abruptly.

"Frank Bathurst suggests as a motto for the Academy catalogue, 'What are the wild waves saying? do you like it?'"

"Yes—were you alone when you got to love those waves?"

"Quite alone," he replied; and then as she almost seemed to sigh in relief as she looked up at him, he repeated more emphatically still, "Quite alone."

If he had repeated the words a dozen times she would not have been satisfied with the sound of them, but would have cried in her heart, "That strain again? it hath a dying fall." It was music to her, sweet, full, rich, sufficient. Music to her, that assurance he gave her that the wild waves said nothing to him of one whom he had loved and looked upon when he loved and looked upon them. She was quite contented with that implied assurance—quite charmed with the fitness of the motto—quite satisfied with what the "wild waves were saying," and quite oblivious of Frank Bathurst.

Beatrix Talbot's impulse toward Lionel had been a true one; her brother was her best friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAPHNE.

THERE was a conservatory at the garden end of the studio. At least it had been a conservatory, but was now cleared of its plants and occupied by a dais for the models to pose upon. From one end of this part of the studio a spiral staircase led up to an observatory on the leads, where a delightful view, consisting of a bit of Bayswater and a slice of Kensington Gardens, could be had. Up this staircase the four young people walked after a time, leaving Mrs. Lyon (who had been more engrossed by the lay figures than anything else) to follow at her leisure.

"Story" the waves had "none to tell" to her. "Venus" on the mountain made her uncomfortable, and brought back all her doubts as to the wisdom of having come here; and the "spirited" composition of the Battle of the Bards seemed to her simply a representa-

tion of an infernal orgie. But she took a calm pleasure in examining the magnified doll, and trying how its joints worked; thus innocently destroying some folds in the drapery which Frank spent a long time in arranging that morning.

"A nice room wasted—entirely wasted," she said to herself, as she surveyed the studio.

Frank Bathurst had been at considerable trouble and expense about this studio. He had first had two rooms on the ground floor thrown into one, and then he had put up a groined and vaulted oak ceiling, thus spoiling the rooms above it. It had a richly-colored window at one end; pomegranate-hued curtains of soft sweeping velvet fell in full folds from ceiling to floor. It was enriched with oak carvings, with ebony brackets and bronzes, with perfect casts from perfect originals, with rare old glass, with deeply-embossed shield resting on some sort of stand of metal in which Quintin Matsys had had a hand. The sunlight, what there was of it on that winter's day, fell upon the floor in broad, rich masses; the shadows lay in unbroken grand depths; there was nothing slight, nothing pale, nothing puerile about the room, and Mrs. Lyon deemed it very dull.

She had been uncertain whether to go with them when they went up on the leads or to stay behind. While revolving the uncertainty in her mind, their voices sounded faintly in what seemed the far distance to her, and at the same time a tall, curiously-carved screen, drawn across in such a way as almost to cut off a corner of the room, caught her attention. So, with an emphatically-worded observation on the folly of people taking so many unnecessary steps to see so little as could be seen from the top of a house in Bayswater, Mrs. Lyon walked toward the screen, and proceeded to curiously inspect it.

It was an elaborate piece of workmanship, modern, perfectly artistic in proportion, and delicate in detail. Titania, Oberon and Puck wreathing themselves and each other in fanciful garlands in the center, and wood-nymphs and satyrs doing nothing remarkable at the sides.

"A nicely-grained piece of wood spoiled!" Mrs. Lyon thought, as she put her hand upon it to see whether the dimness came from dust or not (in order that she might do a good turn to the helpless gentlemen who owned it, by denouncing the dusty proclivities of their house-maid). She put her hand upon it; the screen turned easily on a swivel at the lightest touch, and it revolved, leaving the corner exposed.

Mrs. Lyon uttered a little cry of mingled horror and virtuous satisfaction at having unearthed the cause of it, for there, in a large arm-chair, her head thrown back upon the "velvet violet lining," a pretty, yellow-haired girl lay sleeping.

The girl and all the accessories were so pretty that most people would have been content to keep silence, and look on the scene as one of the fair sights in life which, perfect in themselves, may be suffered to pass by unquestioned. But Mrs. Lyon liked to grapple with difficulties that were not—loved to defend what was not assailed, delighted in putting things straight before they were crooked. "I can scarcely believe my eyes," she exclaimed, believing them thoroughly the while, and quite ready to do battle in the cause of their trustworthiness, should anyone hint at optical delusion. "I can scarcely believe my eyes; young woman, this is shameless!"

The girl, who had opened her eyes at the first sound, sat up at the last words and suppressed a yawn. She was dressed in a costume for which Mrs. Lyon had no precedent, though Frank Bathurst had given much thought and consideration to it; and on her bright, yellow-haired head she had a little cap of black velvet, bordered with seed pearls. In fact, she was the model "princess" for whose heart and hand the bards were singing; and she had fallen asleep after waiting a long time for Mr. Bathurst, and now she woke up, startled and rather cross.

"This is shameless," Mrs. Lyon repeated; and the girl, thinking she was being rebuked for drowsiness, being indeed guiltless of every other offense, waxed petulant with the old lady who came instead of the smiling, handsome, agreeable gentleman whom she (the model) had expected to see. She was a pretty girl, and her beauty was very much in favor that year; accordingly her time was fully occupied, and she was getting into the habit of giving herself little airs of conferring a favor when she kept an appointment. Moreover, she was a good deal admired in a certain dance in one of the pantomimes, for she joined the profession of ballet-girl to that of model. On the whole, it will readily be surmised that she was not likely to be meek under the reproof of Mrs. Lyon.

"Then he should have come back," she retorted, on the supposition that she had been wanted and missed while she had been sleeping. And she pushed her bright yellow hair out of her eyes and glanced up defiantly, instead of being crushed to the ground, as Mrs. Lyon half anticipated seeing her.

"He should have come back!" Mrs. Lyon repeated the words in sheer amazement at their audacity. "He" was her remote relation, "he" might be good enough to marry Blanche, if no awful discoveries were made; and this "minx," as she called the model in her wrath, dared to speak of him thus familiarly.

"It is too late for anything now, so I shall go," the girl said, rising up and casting a glance toward the darkening shadows that were falling over the dias where she sat a princess in the morning; then the stream of Mrs. Lyon's virtuous eloquence burst the banks of astonishment and indignation, and she poured forth a flood of words that were utterly incomprehensible, but at the same time intensely aggravating to the model.

"Too late! lost! lost! unhappy creature!"

"Oh! it's not of such consequence as that!" the girl interrupted, hastily tossing her head; then she added something relative to Mr. Bathurst missing her more than she should him—a statement which caused Mrs.

Lyon to tremble and pronounce the word "abandoned" under her breath.

As the girl leisurely put off the jacket and tunic and velvet cap of royalty, and inducted herself into the bonnet and mantle of this period, Mrs. Lyon gazed at her, and made profound reflections to herself on the callousness which could be so unmoved under detection and the frivolity which could attempt to disguise vice in fanciful splendor. Then she thought that it would be a good thing to remove this fair young rock on which he might split out of reach of temptation—at any rate out of reach of Mr. Frank Bathurst; and then she calculated the cost of the charitable act, and wondered if she had money enough in her pocket to do it, before the young people came down from the roof of the house.

"If you would alter your mode of life I might assist you," she began, drawing out her purse; and the girl, who was adjusting the bows of her bonnet-strings with great care before she went out, stared at Mrs. Lyon, as if that lady was beyond her comprehension, as indeed she was.

"After my mode of life? not on any account, thank you," then she thought of her Terpsichorean triumphs and determined to very much dazzle the old lady. "Do you know who I am?" she asked; and Mrs. Lyon looking a horror-stricken negative at once, the girl went on glibly: "I'm Miss Rosalie St. Clair, there—good morning," and walked out, happily unconscious of the meaningless sound that name had for Mrs. Lyon.

The skirmish had been sharp, but brief. Mrs. Lyon had almost a feeling of triumph when she reflected on how quickly she had, as she thought, routed the fair invader. Now the danger had departed, she began to make many hazy, but comforting conjectures respecting it. After all, it might not be Mr. Bathurst whom the girl had spoken of as "he." Mr. Lionel Talbot was very quiet; but—ah! it looked bad—very bad. She remembered now that he had eaten no luncheon. At this juncture she remembered that the girl had used Mr. Bathurst's name, which proved him the offender. "I declare one had better be in a lion's den at once," she murmured, pathetically, "and then one would know what one was about." Then she fell to softly bemoaning the combination of circumstances which had brought her into this difficulty, and wondered whether she had better tell Mr. Talbot about it, and wandered what Blanche would say now (Blanche being quite innocent of all former thought or speech on the subject), and "hoped Miss Talbot would listen to advice another time" (not that any had been offered to poor Trixy), and was altogether hopeless and helpless, and overcome by a sense of responsibility.

"What could they be doing up on the leads all this time!" The leads, in Mrs. Lyon's imagination, was a place of gruesome horror, slippery, flat, with no parapet. She wished that she had gone up with them. She wished that she could put old heads on young shoulders (this last wish not being weakened by the faintest doubt as to the great superiority of her own over every other head belonging to the party). She wished that they had all staid at home, and that Mrs. Sutton had come with them, and a great many more totally irreconcilable things.

Meantime those on the house-top had been so happy, so entirely unconscious of the cark and care, the tumult and the strife that was raging at the foot of the spiral staircase. There was a glass erection on the leads—an eminent photographer had lived there before Mr. Bathurst took the house—and under this glass they stood about and were happy.

Very happy, on the whole, all of them; though Beatrix Talbot went up and came down in her spirits in the sharp, sudden, unreasoning way that is specially symptomatic of the disease under which she labored. The very manner and the very looks which won her more and more, which drew her nearer, and made Frank Bathurst dearer to her, became so many sources of irritation to Trixy. She had reached the stage when a vague feeling of the loved one being unjust is born. He had it in his power to make her so supremely happy—to exalt her, she fondly believed, above all women—by telling her and all the world that loved her, and he did not avail himself of it. She would have disavowed the feeling, had it been placed before her in the bald, cold words I have used. She would have disowned all connection with it, and probably have declared it to be unwomanly, forward and vain; and she would have tried to believe that she meant what she professed, and taken herself sharply to task for venturing to love before the "object" had asked for her formally in holy matrimony; and all the time would have gone fretting and loving, and being happy and miserable, as it is, and has been and ever shall be.

But though he had it in his power to make her supremely blessed, and did not seem at all likely to do it, she took the good the gods gave, and was grateful. It was something, in default of security of passing her life in the sun of his presence, to be warmed by his smiles; and he was no niggard of these, giving them lavishly when he pleased—and he was always pleased when pretty women were by, especially if they liked him. Their beauty and his pleasure in it reacted upon each other. The better pleased they were with him the prettier they looked; and the prettier they looked the better pleased he was with them. It was a charmed circle, and Frank Bathurst delighted in drawing it closer and in strengthening it; and generally, in gathering his roses while he might—while they grew well within reach, where he could gather them easily—there was no charm in difficulty to him.

"If she slight me when I woo,
I will scorn and let her go."

he would carol gayly, on the smallest sign of coyness—it needed not to be "coldness" making itself manifest in the demeanor of the Cynthia of the minute. Indeed, now it was only Blanche Lyon's more openly shown pleasure in

his society that was swaying him slightly from Miss Talbot. According to his gay, bright, practical creed, life was too short to waste one hour of it in looking for anybody's hidden motives. The frankly-expressed joy, the readily-vouchsafed sympathy, the open preference, were so many tributes to his vanity—and his vanity was great. It was so glancing and sunny that Blanche, who to a certain extent appreciated it already, saw in it nothing to resent or regret, and so fed it a little—"pandered to it," Trixy Talbot termed it, in her anger; for Trixy felt the vanity would be a permanent rival to her—and still would not have had the smallest change made in the man who was vain. He was a genuine "source of joy and woe" to Miss Talbot, but he was a source of joy pure and simple to Blanche Lyon, and she showed him that he was this; and so he took the turning that should eventually lead him into error.

Mrs. Sutton had been compelled to remain away, by reason of a very unforeseen and inopportune event, which will be duly chronicled. It was an event that caused her a good deal of savage sorrow, and the sole balm she could find for the wound was, that the "affair would be a failure without her." She felt quite convinced in her acute mind that Mrs. Lyon would by some over-anxiety or misapprehension, mar the "fair form of festal day," and she was gently pleased therewith, after the fashion of Marian. If in fancy she could have seen the quartette upon the leads, the ground would have been very much cut from under her feet.

It would be difficult to define the ingredients which went to the composition of their ecstatic satisfaction that day. It always is difficult to ascertain what makes people who are in love so superbly satisfied with each other; for they are rarely brilliant or at ease under the circumstances. But this difficulty does not do away with the fact of their being so.

Frank Bathurst, in reality the most thoughtless of the party knew quite well why he liked it. Those two girls, with their lovely faces, good figures, and gracefully-falling draperies, alone would have been enough for him. But he had another source of pleasure. Lionel Talbot and he were attached to one another. A good deal of boyish enthusiasm mingled itself with a good deal of genuine affection. Frank respected Lionel, valued his opinion, especially when it coincided with his (Frank's) own. They had the spirit of comradeship upon them strongly, and it pleased Frank that they should be together. When it happened so, Mr. Bathurst liked to have his taste for beauty and grace and fascination indorsed by his friend. When his friend could not indorse it, it must in honesty be added that Frank was perfectly resigned. But in this case it was palpable that their tastes matched; and Frank was not at all jealous, but magnanimous, as became him—gracious in calling Trixy's attention to the graceful bearing of the other pair leaning against one of the supports of the glass walls—nobly indifferent to the fact of Blanche lowering her voice to a tenderer tone when she addressed Lionel than Mr. Bathurst had ever heard her use to himself.

"Isn't it strange that we should all have come together? I was just going to ask you how you thought you would like my cousin, Miss Talbot, forgetting that she is my cousin, and that I mustn't express curiosity about her."

"But you may—to me at least; and I think I like her very much, very much," Trixy replied, with a little more earnestness than she would have employed if she thought so. "Won by beauty—we are all liable to be that, you know, Mr. Bathurst."

"Yes—and she has beauty—marvelous beauty," he answered, warming to his topic at once. "Look at her hands—I think they're the sweetest little hands I ever saw."

Trix assented. Her own hands were equally pretty; but it was scarcely her place to call his attention to this fact.

"And her head!" he went on animatedly. "There is something wonderfully taking in the turn of her head—a way I never saw in any other woman. Do you notice it?"

He turned a questioning glance towards Trixy as he spoke. She had fixed her eyes steadfastly on the girl she believed to be her rival—her lashes were leveled, not lowered—her brow was bent painfully, and her lips were a little more compressed than was usual. Altogether there was a look of sad, yearning interest in that love-fraught face that stirred some fibres in his heart. She was as beautiful as Blanche—quite as beautiful; and she had this brief advantage, that Blanche was engaged with some one else at the moment, and she (Trix) was not. He felt all sorts of compliments to her on the spot, and longed to pay one without seeming abrupt.

His diffidence about it served him in good stead; for Trixy marked it, and felt it to be the most graceful one he could have paid her. "Mrs. Lyon's patience will be exhausted," she exclaimed, blushing a little. "We are forgetting the time altogether. Will you ask Miss Lyon to come down?" As he moved to ask Miss Lyon "to come down," a bit of daphne he had worn in his coat fell to the ground. They all moved in close together. Blanche Lyon dropped her glove, and herself stooped to pick it up; and when Mr. Bathurst, the last of the party, looked for it, the daphne was gone. The color rose even to his brow, and he turned a careless ear to the sour tones with which Mrs. Lyon met her daughter, and indirectly reproached them all for having been so long.

Presently they separated, the ladies going back in bleak silence to Victoria street, and the two men driving up to their club. Almost for the first time in his life, Frank Bathurst was glad of the excuse his spirited horses gave him of concentrating his attention on them, to the neglect of Lionel Talbot, who sat by his side. He had never seen Lionel so completely resign

himself to the charm of any woman's society as he had this day resigned himself to Miss Lyon. He (Frank Bathurst) had been void of all active feeling on the subject at the time—all feeling save that of pleasure at seeing his friend pleased. But now!—he had seen Blanche bend down for the fallen glove; and he rejoiced more in the loss of his daphne that he had done in its possession.

CHAPTER IX.

"BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER."

Six years ago, when Fate had graciously bestowed that white elephant Marian upon Mr. Sutton, he had made an earnest but fruitless attempt to arouse her interest on behalf of some members of his own family. His father and mother were dead, but his brothers and a sister were alive and in high health, and anything but corresponding circumstances. Mark had been, as has been seen, the successful one of the family. The rest had laid their respective talents up in a spirit of over-caution that had kept both excitement and wealth from their doors. They had all given vent to warning sounds, and been ready with fluent prognostications of evil things to come for him when Mark commenced the speculations that eventually floated him on to fortune. They had stood afar off from him, prophesying that he would go up like a rocket, perhaps, and down like its stick surely, and had generally been sententious and given to declaring that the paths their parents trod, and the lives their parents led, and the modest competencies their parents made, were good and great enough for them.

But when Mark succeeded—when he went up like the before-quoted rocket, and seemed very unlikely to come down again, they forgave him for having falsified their predictions, and affably borrowed money of him wherewith to increase their own business, and were altogether affectionate, and much imbued with the family mind toward him, as was fit and wise.

Mark Sutton being a plain, practical man, opposed unconsciously to vain expectations of people being nobler than they were, accepted the change in the fraternal sentiments toward himself, and seemed to consider them as the reasonable offspring of commonsense and expediency. He knew that they had all thought him wrong in by-gone days. He knew that they had been wrong in thinking this, and he knew that they knew that he knew it. But he took his triumph meekly, and never reminded them of anything that they evidently wished to forget, and altogether conducted himself for a while quite after the pattern of the ideal rich relation of romance.

His only sister had married a farmer and grazier of the name of Bowden—a man who was rich in flocks and herds, and who commanded a good market. He had died shortly before Mark Sutton's marriage with Miss Talbot, leaving his widow and four children (all girls) amply provided for, under a will of which Mark Sutton, who was also his nieces' guardian, was sole executor. Shortly after Bowden's death Mark Sutton married, and made that earnest attempt which has been chronicled to interest Marian in his relations—principally in Mrs. Bowden and her daughters. And Marian mutely refused to be interested, and Mark tacitly accepted her decision.

Still though his sister girded against him garrulously down in her own locality, in the heart of a midland county, for letting his "fine lady-wife wean him from his own flesh and blood," the management of her affairs continued in his hands, and her store increased. From time to time he borrowed money of her, money which was always quickly returned with heavy interest; and at length he persuaded her to let him speculate on her account, which she did, until at the date of the opening of this story the well-to-do widow had become a very wealthy one.

When Mr. Bowden died his eldest daughter, a sharp little girl of twelve, had been removed from school "to be a comfort" to her mother. In sober truth, Mrs. Bowden stood in no special need of particular comfort at this juncture, for the deceased Mr. Bowden had never been much more than the bread-winner to her; and she was a woman blessed with a sound digestion, a good appetite, and an aptitude for finding consolation in solid comforts. But she was a decorous woman, one who never put herself up in the slightest degree against public opinion. So when the clergyman of the little country town where she lived told her "she must live for her children now," and two or three of her neighbors added that if they were in her place they "would have Elly home"; none could say how much better she would feel if she kept the dear child under her own eye—when these things had been duly said, and enforced with the sighs and shakes of the head that are ordinarily and judiciously brought to bear on the bereaved, Mrs. Bowden took Elly home, and at once ceased to think of her object in doing so.

Her uncle and guardian agreed to the plan, thinking perhaps that he could do nothing else, since his wife had made it impossible for other than mere business relations to exist between his sister and himself. So without let or hindrance Miss Bowden came home from school, and grew up in the atmosphere of a country town—grew up just what might have been expected from her parentage, her wealth, and the liberty she enjoyed.

Now it happened that though Mark Sutton was much older in years, and far more experienced on the Stock Exchange than Edgar Talbot, that the latter had obtained a business ascendancy over his brother-in-law—an ascendancy of a marked and positive character—an ascendancy which Mr. Edgar Talbot did not hesitate to employ when it suited his purpose. It had suited his purpose lately to raise heavy sums of money from Mark Sutton, and additionally to make Mark a sort of partner in his ventures. What those ventures were

need not be told here. It would be easy to introduce facts connected with the Stock Exchange—easy to employ technicalities in describing them—easy to pad this story with any quantity of business matter, but I shall refrain from doing so. The high stakes for which Edgar Talbot was playing were a brilliant, unassailable social position, and a power of influencing divers governments through his treasures. The alternations of his luck will be marked, but there is no need to describe each card as he plays it.

The last effort of this embryo Rothschild's mind over Mr. Sutton resulted in the latter attempting to negotiate a loan with his sister, Mrs. Bowden. He had every reason to suppose that she would accede willingly to his proposition. The fortune her husband had left had been more than doubled by her brother's judicious investments. But Mrs. Bowden was a cautious woman, and now that it had come to Mark wanting to borrow a very heavy sum of her, she suffered no sentiments of gratitude for the luck that had hitherto attended his speculations on her behalf to intervene, but resolved not to give him a favorable answer until she had seen him, learned his views, understood his plans, and won through his wife an introduction into society for Miss Bowden.

London life—at least the London life led by Mr. and Mrs. Sutton—loomed largely in the atmosphere of that lively country town where Mrs. Bowden lived. Partly through ignorance, and partly through pride, she over-rated the position of Mark and his wife. In his quiet, and unobtrusive way he had put Marian before his own people as a star of great magnitude; and so Mrs. Bowden, away out of reach of the crucible where Mrs. Sutton's pretensions could be tested, fell into error respecting her sister-in-law, and pictured her as one of the most brilliant, persistent, and powerful votaries of pleasure and fashion. It may be added that Mrs. Bowden's notions as to the career run by one of these favored beings had been gathered from a diligent perusal of the novels of the silver-fork school. What added pungency to the desire she had that through that lady's influence Ellen would marry well—at any rate, be induced to forget an old friend who had grown up loving and loved by her.

So when Mark Sutton asked a good big favor of her, she determined to make the granting of it well worth her own while.

"Before I lend the money to you I should like to have a conversation with you. It would be idle to seek to draw Mrs. Mark and you out of the gay vortex by inviting you here, so I shall take Elly up to London for a month, starting to-morrow, when we shall have opportunities for meeting."

Then she went on to give him her London address—a good family hotel in Piccadilly, for it was no part of her plan to force herself upon him at his house until he entreated her to come.

He had received this letter (only the housemaid who lighted the fire the following morning with the torn copies of it knew what it had cost Mrs. Bowden in the indicting of it) on the day the Lyons' advent at Edgar Talbot's house. During the evening he had communicated the contents of it to Edgar adding that he had said nothing about it yet to Marian, as she shrank from all association with his family.

"She must get over that falsely fine folly in this case," her brother said, almost harshly; "you must make Marian civil to your sister. Then he took Mrs. Bowden's note and glanced over it again, sneering and laughing to himself at that phrase about the "gay vortex," and added, "she comes up to-day I see; you must make Marian call on her to-morrow."

Somehow or other it hurt Mark Sutton to hear this tone used about his wife, even by her own brother. "I will ask her to do it," he answered, curtly.

"Ask her, and you know what she'll say, or at least what she will look, if you 'ask' her in that tone; you must make her do it, Mark."

"That I can not."

"Then I can."

Edgar Talbot spoke abruptly and imperiously, and Mark Sutton had to fall back upon the old, ever-recurring situation of accepting what Edgar had spoken, in dread lest he should speak still worse things. It was always well within the bounds of probability that Marian might have been guilty of some act of folly with which her brother was acquainted, though her husband was not.

"If her regard for me" (Mark Sutton spoke in a very low, humble tone)—"If her regard for me prompts her to please me by calling on my sister, I shall be grateful to her; but I will not coerce her."

He spoke so decidedly that Edgar Talbot said no more to him about the matter. But the following day—long before Mrs. Lyon had got herself and her scruples under way for the studio—Mr. Talbot had called on Mrs. Sutton, and made her see the propriety not so much of calling on Mrs. Bowden without delay, as of obliging him.

"You will be prepared to meet them then, I hope, for I am sure I shall not know who else to ask," she said, scornfully. To which he replied—

"Oh, nonsense! that sort of thing is all nonsense; women's minds are always running on the necessity for organizing dreary social gatherings. You need not ask me or any one else to meet them—only be civil to them."

"How?"

"That I leave to you," he replied, rising up to go away. "I only tell you to lose no time about it."

So it came to pass that Mrs. Sutton, instead of going to the studio, went to call on her husband's sister.

It was about as distasteful an employment as could possibly have been conceived for her by her worst enemy. The widow was far from being the most terrible part of the trial to Marian. Mrs. Bowden was a happy, hearty, large, buxom woman, who made a merit of and

reveled in her lack of refinement. She was honest, outspoken, healthy, and aggressively high-spirited and hilarious. There was a touch of sly humor in the way she made manifest her perfect understanding of the causes which had brought Mrs. Mark to call upon her at last; and Marian recognized this touch, and appreciated it as a species of cunning insight into other people's feelings that was twin to her own. Moreover, for herself, Mrs. Bowden wanted nothing of the fair, selfish lady, whose power of giving was gained entirely from Mrs. Bowden's brother. A course of shopping, methodical and unceasing, during the week, and a course of musical services at one of the churches most celebrated for its choir on Sundays, was all Mrs. Bowden desired for herself in the way of metropolitan gayety. But she asked for more than these things for her daughter.

The girl was standing by the window when Mrs. Bowden came into the room, looking out upon the careless stir and excitement in which she had no share, and half wishing herself at home again, where every spot had its interest, and every hour its occupation for her. She looked out upon a butcher's shop, a publishing office, and a cab stand. There was nothing visible of the glory and grandeur, of the beauty and fashion of which she had heard and read. The high street of their own little country town could show them brighter and more seductive shop windows than any she could see from her post of observation in this excellent family hotel. Overladen omnibuses—they seemed overladen to her—horribly horsed cabs, and long lines of earnest, anxious-looking pedestrians! The heart of the country girl sank down as she looked out on these things, and felt despondingly that she had nothing brighter before her for a month. As this conviction smote her, "Mrs. Sutton" was announced, and she turned and acknowledged that something brighter was before her already.

Marian has been already described. Picture her now as she came in with a bright, light, rose tint on her cheeks, the effect of the winter air and of annoyance that was hardly subdued. She looked pretty, graceful, smooth. There was a promise about her appearance of those better things which Miss Bowden had vaguely expected to find in London. She welcomed them, and made manifest her sense of the relationship that existed between them in a few simple words that seemed to Elly Bowden the perfection of sound. Mrs. Sutton was neither too warm nor too cool to them. She had, in truth, made a little study of the manner it would be advisable to bring to bear upon them, and she was perfect in her part, hard as it was for her to play to such an audience.

To the girl who turned from the window to meet her, Mrs. Sutton took a contemptuous dislike at once. Theoretically she had always despised the Bowdens, and held aloof from them, as has been seen, and now at sight of them she declared to herself that her theory was justified. There was no appeal against that decision, no softening influence in the mother's evident pleasure, and the girl's evident gratitude to her for having come at all. She contrasted Miss Bowden's healthy, mottled, plump cheeks with her own little, delicate, fair face; and when the girl put a great, hearty, rather red hand out to her Mrs. Sutton had strong need to remember all her brother's injunctions before she could bring herself to touch it with cordiality.

"I bring a message from Mark; he will give me an hour here alone to get acquainted with you, and then he will call for me," she said, turning to the beaming Mrs. Bowden, who forgave the estrangement at once, after a generous fashion that Marian would have thought utterly incompatible with her sister-in-law's manner and provincialisms, had she given herself to the consideration of such trifling causes and effects. And then Mrs. Bowden, after declaring that she "should be glad to see her brother at any time," grew affectionately communicative to his herald, until Mrs. Sutton had to strengthen herself by the reflection that an hour is only sixty minutes, and that "everything must come to an end."

By-and-by Mrs. Bowden made an excuse for banishing her daughter for a while, in order that she might discuss some of her own hopes concerning Ellen and Ellen's character with the new relative, about whose magically refining touch Mrs. Bowden permitted herself to be very hopeful.

"Is that your eldest daughter?" Mrs. Sutton inquired, as Miss Bowden went away from the room, reluctantly, in obedience to the maternal behest, to search for something that she had grave doubts as to her mother having brought with her, and no doubt at all as to her mother not wanting. Mrs. Sutton made this in order that it might be understood that she had never pursued the subject of Mark's relations with keen interest. In fact, she was keeping the "word of promise" she had given Edgar Talbot "to the ear, and breaking it to the sense" in that there was nothing tangible in her manner, of which Mrs. Bowden, a woman who was acute enough in her feelings, could take hold and complain even to her own heart about; so she answered now in perfectly good faith:

"Yes, my eldest, and though I say it, who shouldn't say it—though why a mother shouldn't I have never been quite sure—as good a girl as ever lived; foolish, as young people will be, you know, my dear, very foolish indeed."

"Indeed," Mrs. Sutton replied, with the faintest possible accent of interest.

"Yes," Mrs. Bowden responded warmly, to even that faint tone of interest, for her heart was wholly with her children, and she grew very thoroughly in earnest the instant aught concerning them was mooted. Then she went on to tell how Elly had given her heart to the son of an old neighbor of theirs, a "young man who was deserving enough, but who came of a stock who never could do more than pay their way, and whose way was a hard one. I have nothing to say against John Wilmot," she added; and Mrs. Sutton looked serenely indifferent to anything that could possibly be urged in extenuation of or in malice against him. "I have nothing

to say against John Wilmot, but Elly might do better—and she will get to feel that after seeing more of you."

In a moment the indirect flattery made its mark. The insatiable, grasping vanity of the woman who listened made the commonplace words of the one who spoke dangerous, and productive of evil consequences. Mrs. Sutton liked to feel that in her more graceful presence was the power of making a true-hearted, contented girl feeble and dissatisfied. There would be a double dissatisfaction in doing this. She would at once revenge herself on these people for being connected with her (in herself an unpardonable audacity), and she would prove to her husband and her astute brother Edgar that they had erred in forcing this personal communication upon her. There was nothing Mrs. Sutton liked better than hurting some one else when she was offended. If she could make the offender suffer it was good; if she could not, she would in some way wound the next nearest, and be satisfied. These Bowdens were innocent of all wrong toward her (save the original one of being her husband's kin); but not the less did she mean to make them smart if she could do so with such a smiling exterior as would save her from being found out.

"When people put themselves out of their proper place it serves them right if they suffer for it," Mrs. Sutton thought placidly, as she sat and listened to Mrs. Bowden's hopeful predictions concerning the future of her daughter, if by any happy chance John Wilmot could be put out of her head. The thought that she could deftly put in a few refining touches of sorrowful experience on the canvas of Elly's life, almost reconciled the elegant aunt to the prospect of the companionship of the inelegant niece for a time. The girl had, during their short colloquy, betrayed something like a genuine love for the home and the friends she had so recently left; and this had roused a spirit of antagonism in Marian, who had not a genuine love for any thing save herself. "If they force her upon me she will go home and find her John Wilmot tame, dull, and unprofitable," Marian thought, when Mrs. Bowden had finished her unwise revelations. "They will all bore her, and she will never be fit for anything better, and it will serve her right for putting herself out of her proper place." It would have been malevolent on the part of an old, ugly, unattractive woman to harbor such thoughts as these. For the wording of less hurtful ones old women have struggled in horse-ponds, and been otherwise tortured by their more enlightened fellows as witches, dangerous to the community. But Marian Sutton "was fair, and young, and beautiful exceedingly;" moreover, she did not work her thoughts, nor did she suffer the reflection of them to appear on her face as they rippled through her mind. Both Mrs. Bowden and Ellen were delighted with her, and with the suggestive half-promises she made of future intercourse—delighted with and charmed by her long before Mark Sutton came to fetch her and welcome them.

There was rather a fuller exhibition of family feeling made when he arrived. Mrs. Bowden had restrained herself with difficulty before, but when he came she would ask what he thought of Elly? and point out in what respect that young lady resembled the Suttons more than the Bowdens. "She favors her father about the eyes, and her hands are the same shape as his; but in all else I see our mother in her, don't you, Mark?" Mrs. Bowden asked, looking with affectionate, admiring eyes on the blooming, buxom girl, who lapsed into awkward consciousness of a terribly crushing nature under the ill-advised observations. It worried Miss Bowden and nearly made her cry to see Mrs. Sutton's eyes settle upon the hands quoted, and travel slowly over their length and breath. They grew redder and thicker while the tour of inspection lasted. The handsome ring the girl wore seemed to make the finger it was upon stand out in cruelly strong relief, in a way it had never done before, poor Elly could have vowed. Miss Bowden's sole previous experience of great ladies (in her amiable ignorance she placed Mrs. Sutton at once in her list) had been gained from the squire's wife down at Bayford, a kindly old lady, before whom Elly never trembled and distrusted her own hands. But this remembrance brought her no relief now, as she sat wondering what it was that made her so different to her uncle's wife.

CHAPTER X.

SELF-DECEPTION.

THE winter months wore away, speedily for some of these people whose fortunes we are following, slowly for others, surely for all. Mrs. Lyon, for instance, found the life she had undertaken to lead for Miss Talbot's benefit very different to that which she had anticipated leading. There was less variety, less excitement, less dining out and dinner giving, less dressing, less dancing, less amusements altogether, and, consequently, less occasion for her to urge faint protests against dissipation than she had confidently looked forward to being able to do. Accordingly sometimes the hours lagged, and the days seemed long, and everything a mistake. On the other hand, Blanche, also, found it all very different to her preconceived fears. Now that Mr. Talbot had established Mrs. Lyon as Trix's chaperon and guardian angel in society, he seemed quite contented to keep Trix very much out of society. In short, he instituted a quiet, regular routine, which Blanche saw established with very great pleasure, and which she helped very materially to maintain in unbroken integrity.

"I have a good deal on my mind, and I do not care to go and stand about on other people's staircases just now; you must go without me, Trix," Edgar Talbot said to his sister, when an invitation for the whole party (which Mrs. Sutton had procured for them) arrived shortly after Mrs. Lyon and her daughter had come to live with them. "Nor do I, not a bit, Edgar," Trix replied, eagerly. Then Miss Talbot had gone on to give

her brother several excellent and unanswerable reasons against her going out for a while. And he being glad to keep his home circle intact, accepted them after a brief protest.

"But the Lyons! It's not fair to cage Miss Lyon here in solitude," he said to his sister.

Trix moved her shoulders with a little impatient gesture. Something had made the girl very clear-sighted about many matters, and she saw, as in a crystal ball, that Blanche Lyon was as averse, or rather as indifferent, to miscellaneous gatherings as she was herself. Miss Talbot accounted for this fact very readily and very bitterly, when she condescended to take counsel of herself concerning it. The two young painters—the genuine artist and the dashing amateur—were not about in the set to which Edgar and the Suttons had access; "and she only cares to meet her cousin," Trix thought, indignantly, as she answered:

"Oh, a home life suits the Lyons best; they say so. Pray don't think of them."

But Edgar did think of them, or, at least of one of them, and pleased himself harmlessly by thinking what a good thing it was that "a home life suited them best;" it suited him best too. When some of his ships came home—when some of the schemes now trembling in the balance between failure and success were assured of the latter—when, in fact, the scores of brilliant probabilities that had rather overset his judgment of late, and made him rash, resolved themselves into accomplished facts—then he would speed his wooing, and Blanche Lyon and he would have a home life worth living.

So he thought, and hoped, and planned for the future, and meanwhile tried to be very well satisfied with things as they were. Blanche Lyon was evidently becoming interested in him, he felt. She showed it in the thousand delicate, minute, almost imperceptible ways in which a refined woman can show it, he assured himself. She was interested in his family, interested even in that praiseworthy but minor matter of his brother's success. In a conversation she had with him one day—a conversation in which she was quite carried out of her customary calm which marked her demeanor toward him—she spoke out some of her thoughts as to the relative merits of Mr. Bathurst's and Mr. Lionel Talbot's works in a way that nearly cured Edgar of his jealousy of the former. "You compare them! You actually compare them!" she said, in the petulant tone of one who is stung out of all power of praying the comparison odious by its having been made at all. "They are on such different levels that you must pull one up or drag the other down in doing it; it's not fair to your brother."

"The time has not arrived, in your estimation, then, for Cæsar to be praised without derogating from Pompey."

"Your quotation hardly fits the subject. If you do not feel what I do about it, Mr. Talbot, it is hopeless to try and teach you. I appreciate all Frank Bathurst has done, and is trying to do, and thinks he is trying to do. I think it is very good of him, in a way, to make the attempt to be something more than other people have made him; and I hope his picture will be hung and well mentioned, and then he can go on painting and having something to think about; but it's absurd to compare him with your brother."

She was a woman who emphasized her words ever so slightly, often laying the stress in the wrong place. In this case she rather softly breathed upon than emphasized the last word of her sentence. And Edgar Talbot felt that it would be well sometimes, perhaps, for his wife to be well disposed towards Lionel, all for his (Edgar's sake) of course. Among other things, he had lately invested Lionel's money in some dazzlingly promising shares on his own account. When the bark of fortune came sailing in, he felt that it would be agreeable to acknowledge the temporary obligation to Lionel, by giving him as large a share as he chose to take in the home life he (Edgar) contemplated. "Do you really feel this about my brother?" he asked, almost tenderly; and Blanche turned her face full upon him, covered, as it was, with a quick, hot blush, as she replied, "Indeed I do; indeed I do, Mr. Talbot." He was resolved to bide his time. But his dream of bliss promised very fairly, he felt.

Meantime Mr. Frank Bathurst, in blest unconsciousness of the exact nature of his cousin's sentiments toward him, went on painting in and painting out his Venuses, and enjoying his life, and cherishing his own notions regarding the daphne, and finding the quiet evenings Lionel and he frequently spent at Edgar Talbot's house better than any other form of entertainment his wealth and position procured him. For some reason or other best known to himself, Mr. Talbot had not fulfilled his threat of requesting Lionel to keep Mr. Bathurst from familiar communion with the home circle. Marking Blanche's manner to Mr. Bathurst with the naturally impartial and unprejudiced eyes of a man who was in love with her himself, Edgar Talbot still saw nothing and feared nothing that could by any possibility affect his peace of mind about her. She was very frank and cordial with Mr. Bathurst; indeed, she talked a great deal more to that blithe and well-satisfied gentleman than she did to any one else. But—and in this, at least, Mr. Talbot did not deceive himself—though she talked to Frank Bathurst more than to any one else, he was far from being the most interesting person to her in the room. She talked to him, and openly expressed pleasure at seeing him; and that the pleasure was unfeigned was patent to any one who chanced to glance at her when the two young men would be announced, and she let him see that the relationship he so ardently claimed was an agreeable fact to her, which, indeed, it was, for the reasons given in a former chapter. So all these circumstances combined to make the quiet domestic evenings exciting and delightful to Frank Bathurst. They were exciting enough to Trix, too; but, perhaps, any one would be justi-

fied in declaring them to be less than delightful to that young lady, as "her eyes on all their motions with a minute observance hung" in a way that spoke eloquently to Lionel.

They were not seeing very much of the Suttons about this time. Mrs. Sutton laughed at the "new order of things," as she termed it, and in addition to laughing at them all she had taken to opposing and irritating Edgar. Whatever hold Edgar had upon her formerly was weakened now, evidently. She ceased to maintain the smallest appearance of respect for his opinions. She openly charged him to Beatrix with being unscrupulous about other people's feelings, fortunes, happiness, honor almost, when his own interests were at stake. Whatever his influence over her had been, she had freed herself from it; and she glared in the freedom, and was more than extravagant and vain, more frivolous and conspicuous than before; and Ellen Bowden was with her a great deal, and Mrs. Bowden began to hope that John Wilmot would soon cease to be a stumbling-block in her pretty daughter's path.

It may be mentioned here that Mrs. Bowden had been very acquiescent about that matter which had been the primary object of her journey to London. She had not only advanced money to her brother (whose own capital was farmed out under Edgar Talbot's advice), but she bought shares in her own and children's names in more than one promising speculation. "Mark was so prudent, far-seeing, honorable, and right-thinking altogether, that there must be safety in following where he led," she argued, when some of her steady-going old country friends warned her against being led away and dazzled by the brazen images that were the reigning gods of the Stock Exchange. Her argument was unanswerable, for Mark Sutton's character for probity and caution was unassailable. Nevertheless, hints to the effect that "even he might be mistaken sometimes," were offered to and disregarded by her. The greed of gain, the fever of gaining on a large scale, had seized Mrs. Bowden. What had been all-sufficient was now as nothing to her; and as her mental grasp was not broad, nor her brain remarkably bright and strong, she grew haggard and harassed over the ceaseless efforts she made to work out (theoretically) infallibly successful combinations. The occupations, interests, and pleasures of the present were all poor and tame to her by comparison with those that might fall to her lot in the future, if every thing went ill, she might soon be reduced to such a position as would cause her present necessities to loom before her regretful vision in the proportion of luxuries. Her mind was much disturbed by these opposite responsibilities, yet she had not the courage and resolution to free herself from their wearing influence by "realizing," even when she might have done so at a great gain. Golden dreams always led her on. Vague fancy beguiled her into believing that the feeling of unrest would pass away with the novelty. She began—being essentially a good-natured woman—to worry herself as to the way in which she should make her old country friends, with their rough manners and tones, quite at home and at their ease in the society of those new ones which her gold would gain her. Moreover, she was a good deal disturbed about Ellen. The girl had been left behind with the aunt, who seemed so anxious to efface all memory of her long-continued neglect by great kindness now—left behind with this aunt very much against her (Ellen's) will. Miss Bowden felt miserably dull and awkwardly out of place at first in the grand solitude to which Mrs. Sutton condemned her (Ellen) while she was unconsciously undergoing a process of polishing that was to render her a more useful instrument in Marian's hands. If Mrs. Sutton had possessed any principle and any honor, she would not have been a bad companion for a young, unformed country girl. As it was, Ellen Bowden insensibly caught a slight reflection of the perfect grace, the unruffled ease, the smooth refinement which leavened all that Mrs. Sutton did and said. Marian had the art of telling her pupil what it would be well for her to do without addressing her directly. It must not be understood by this statement that Mrs. Sutton was guilty of the vulgarity of talking at her guest. But she had a way of telling Ellen about other girls who had the unmistakable stamp of "gentlewoman" upon them; and she would put in the salient points of their manner with a firm, clear touch or two that was not lost upon Ellen, who grew more uniformly quiet, and at the same time less constrained.

Anxious as Mr. Sutton had been that his sister and her family at least should be known to and kindly treated by his wife, he had not gone with the latter cordially when she proposed that Ellen should stay with her for three or four months. "You mean it so kindly" (he always would think the best of any act of Marian's), "that I hardly like to throw cold water on your plan; but I can't fancy that she will be the better for the change, or much of a companion for you; besides, poor girl, she has a sweet-heart down there."

"I did mean it for the best. However, I shall say nothing more; the onus of deciding shall be left with her mother and you now, Mark; but I am sorry you should show them you think me a bad companion for the girl."

After that Mr. Sutton offered no opinion on the subject; and Mrs. Bowden decided that Ellen should remain, as "her aunt so kindly invited her."

After that little period of probation or polishing Mrs. Sutton gave her young charge plenty of change, plenty of gayety, plenty of opportunity of forgetting John Wilmot and the vows she had exchanged with him. But a counter-influence was at work, of which Mrs. Sutton saw and suspected nothing. Mark Sutton never gave his niece any ear-rings, or marvelous ball-dresses—he left all that for Marian to do, and Marian was open-handed; but he gave Ellen something that the girl

could not help valuing more highly than she did any of the things Mrs. Sutton lavished upon her. His gift was a good, genuine, uncalled-for opinion.

"So you're going to marry young Wilmot, Elly?" he said to her, when he was alone with her the first evening of her stay in his house.

"We both mean it now, I believe, uncle," the girl replied, blushing a little.

"And you would be mightily annoyed if he was the first not to mean it, I suppose? But I would rather see you keep honest of the two. Don't make me curse the atmosphere of my home, Elly, by seeing you change in it. Try to keep firm and true; don't get false and fine in it, child!"

The girl looked up wonderingly as he stopped, choked by a sob. He had his handkerchief up to his face, and was trying to cough and cover his emotion, and, by so trying, making it much more apparent to the girl, to whom it revealed many things that he would willingly have concealed.

"I don't think I shall ever disappoint you in that way, uncle," she said, feebly. All her sympathies were aroused by that sudden rent in the veil which habitually fell over Mr. Sutton's domestic policy. All her sympathies were aroused, and yet she feared to betray that she felt any for him, or rather that she felt that there existed cause for her feeling any. It occurred to her, with painful force, that the atmosphere of his home must have been bad for some one, or why should he have warned her against growing "false and fine." The graceful lady who ruled his household and shared his name was fine in the sense that a delicately nurtured and carefully tended flower is so. It was just probable that she might be false also, Ellen thought, as she looked at the grieved, humiliated expression which came like a cloud over Mr. Sutton's honest open face.

So, though Miss Bowden's stay with the Suttons was prolonged far beyond the original term of the invitation, she was not dazzled out of her allegiance to her old love, but remained for several months, at least, as entirely without reproach as Mr. John Wilmot was without fear on her behalf. Mrs. Sutton gave her plenty of amusement, and the girl liked it, for Marian had taken her niece's measure correctly, and only piped such airs as Ellen would care to dance to. Mrs. Sutton was possessed of a fine tact, that would have made her remarkable in a worthy way if she had been a better woman. As it was, it only aided in making her contemptible, but not contemptible to her niece yet. Indeed, Ellen Bowden constructed rather a fine character for Mrs. Sutton, and described the same in warm words to Mr. John Wilmot in one of the many letters that Marian was much too judicious to remark upon. If the girl had dared to do so, if she had not feared wounding the kind heart that so evidently preferred feeding upon itself, she would likely have given her uncle the assurance that his wife never strove in the slightest degree to turn her into any dubious path. But after that one emphatic caution to her Mark Sutton had resolutely held his peace, and had given her no excuse for touching on the topic. Accordingly Ellen nursed her notions respecting the absolute freedom of her will in secrecy, and Mrs. Sutton marked the girl's sense of security in her own integrity of purpose, and took care not to disturb it. Meanwhile Ellen was becoming an ardent student of color and form, and an untiring illustrator, on her own person, of her increase of knowledge on such matters, under the auspices of the clever dress-maker to whom Marian owed so much, in more ways than one.

CHAPTER XI.

DOWN AT HALDON.

MR. LIONEL TALBOT'S picture was hung in the middle room in such a situation that it could be seen even on the first of May, when a rapturous sense of art and a few other motives urges every one in London to go to the Royal Academy. "The Battle of the Bards" had been rejected; and "Venus and Horsel" was unfinished, in consequence of the artist having tired of that type of beauty, since the day the daphne was picked up. So Mr. Bathurst was not represented at that year's exhibition—a thing he had set his heart upon being. The disappointment may seem slight to those who read of it; but in reality it was strong enough to make him take a temporary dislike to the scenes in which it had come upon him, and the haunts where it was well known. He wanted to go into the country, and he wanted Lionel to go with him. He owned a place away in a far-off county—a place that had been left to him by old Mr. Lyon; and he grew eloquent upon its delights one evening at Edgar Talbot's, interspersing his narrative concerning it with soft regrets and gentle remorse for having neglected it so long. "I have never even seen it since it has been my own," he said. "Now I want a place to hide my diminished head in, I remember that there is no place like home." I have given Lionel a full month to go and study the works of his contemporaries—a euphemism for going day after day and gazing fondly at his own pictures—even his insatiable vanity must be satisfied, so I shall drag him with me."

The faces of all his auditors underwent considerable changes of expression as he spoke. They were still—though going out more than they had done at first—leading a comparatively quiet life. The presence of these two young men had come to be considered the brightest element in it.

"How we shall miss you, Lionel!" Beatrix exclaimed quickly.

"And how we shall envy you both!" Blanche Lyon added, hastily.

"I wish some one would drag us all away for a week or ten days," Edgar Talbot put in wearily. June came fraught to him with no breath of roses and murmur of gurgling streams, but only with much additional dust

and lassitude. "I never felt anything like the heat in the city to-day; you fellows are lucky to be able to get out of it."

"Lucky indeed, Mr. Talbot." Mrs. Lyon spoke with a sort of ill-used tone—an expression of being debarred by perverse fate from all such delights as the country in June.

"Why can you not all come and stay with us?" Frank Bathurst asked animatedly of the whole group. "Miss Talbot, do say you would like it; your roses want renovating. I speak as an artist, not as a man, you know! Get your brother to agree with it; the change would do them all good—wouldn't it, Lionel?"

"I hardly know," Lionel answered, abstractedly. He had caught Miss Lyon's eager, hopeful glance, as it rushed out to search for acquiescent looks. "It's not that she cares much for Frank's society," he thought; "perhaps she wishes to see the place of which she might have been mistress—of which she may be mistress still, if she pleases. Do you care to go, Miss Lyon?" he asked aloud, abruptly.

She had let her hands and her work fall into her lap, in the excitement that possessed her while Frank Bathurst was wording his invitation. She could not succeed in raising them and going on untroublingly; so she put her work on the table and rose up, saying:

"Care to go! yes, more than I can say—if the whole party can go. I don't care to see the circle broken—do you, Trixy?"

"Oh no, we must all go," Trixy replied, almost unconscious of what she was saying, by reason of her thinking at the same time, "She means Frank." Simultaneously Edgar Talbot was thinking, "She means me;" and Lionel was thinking her "very lovely."

"Talbot! we wait your decision," Mr. Bathurst said, anxiously. "Let us all go down and take possession of Haldon to-morrow; or Lionel and I would go to-morrow and prepare all things for the reception of the ladies and you the day after; say—shall it be so?"

"Why, we are going to the Opera the night after," Mrs. Lyon suggested, in accents in which the mingling of many feelings might be detected. The poor lady disliked packing, and liked being a martyr, and was therefore "pleased, yet sad," to find that fate had again interposed that slight obstacle the Opera. But Mr. Talbot swept it away; it was enough for him that Blanche wished for the country, and wished for his presence there. She should have both.

"We will go if the rest like the plan as well as I do," he said, cheerfully; and after that there was no mistake about it. Blanche Lyon was very charming and kind to him for the rest of the evening. Assurance as to her having no other interest than himself in the projected visit was made doubly sure by his saying to her, "What if Trixy should come away from Haldon pledged to go back as its mistress?" and her replying, "I hope she will—I should like it of all things."

"Really?" he asked, searchingly.

"Really and truly," she answered, honestly; "it is one of the dearest wishes of my heart that my cousin should marry your sister."

"Will you hold the same language when you have seen Haldon?"

"How can I tell? I shall think the same thought—whether or not I shall word it so as more than I can answer for."

"Don't you think that it's just probable that you may regret that you did not follow the plan old Mr. Lyon chalked out for you?"

She shook her head decidedly.

"Never—never a bit. If I had done so I should never have known"—She almost stopped, but seemed to think better of the weakness, and added the words "any of you," blushing warmly. It was a very unexpected move to him on her part, this frank confession that in knowing him there was full compensation for any loss of riches and power. An unexpected—a daring move. He had always heard, and always thought, that there was something unfeminine in a girl meeting a man half-way in a declaration of love. But now, though it seemed to him that she was meeting him half-way, he could not accuse her of anything unfeminine. It made his heart beat higher with a better hope than he had ever known before, this thought, that in a few days he might be wandering through some sunlit forest glade with this lovely woman by his side, and no stern necessity for going into the city before him. He almost pitied Lionel for being the only one who would be without a special object down at Haldon.

The following morning, while they were busy in preparation for their ten days' stay in the country, Mrs. Sutton came to see Trixy, and learned the move that was to be made the following day. The two girls, Blanche and Beatrix, had, under the influence of the sudden excitement of this unexpected break in their routine, come to rather a fairer understanding than was usual with them. It had flashed upon Trixy with an almost blinding light that Blanche was truthful in the sort of affectionate indifference she professed for Frank Bathurst. They both guarded their respective secrets jealously; and so neither liked to speak openly to the other about that which was nearest to the other's heart. Still, though this reserve was maintained Blanche had spoken of her cousin to Miss Talbot, and had in a way, seemed to withdraw from any claim on his attention. In short, Blanche had perceived at last, that her frank friendliness of demeanor toward her cousin was being misinterpreted by Miss Talbot into a flirtation, and that this misrepresentation was causing Talbot much misery. So she had held aloof from Mr. Bathurst, and by this means had got much nearer to Beatrix, who was consequently ill-disposed toward having Miss Lyon's motive and manners underrated by Marian.

"I am not surprised at anything Edgar does," Mrs. Sutton said, sweetly. "It may suit him to be considered eccentric—madmen never do get such hard

measures dealt to them as sane ones when their schemes fail and look black; but you! what makes you anxious to adorn Miss Lyon's train when she goes husband-hunting?"

"Really, Marian, I cannot agree to such things being said of Blanche—you quite misjudge her."

"Do I?" Mrs. Sutton replied, mimicking her sister's earnestness. "Perhaps I misjudged her when I found her flirting violently with my husband in the Grange garden?—asking him 'to take her part against his wife,' and fooling him because there was no one else to fool."

"I can't believe it of her."

"Well, dear," Mrs. Sutton said, pathetically, "I only hope that when you have a husband she won't quite poison his mind against you; but those frank women who express the liking they have so very openly, that 'there can be no guile in it,' innocents think—don't I know them well? are they not dangerous? Frank Bathurst is just a bit of wax in her hands, to be moulded as she pleases."

"Why take any interest in them when you think so badly of them both?" Trixy urged, bitterly. Mrs. Sutton had made the girl's heart ache again with the hardest ache the human heart can know—doubt of the one loved.

"My interest is vicarious; you are my sister, and I don't want to see you left in the lurch, either as Miss Talbot or Mrs. Bathurst, through Blanche Lyon's machinations. I shall never forget what I felt that day when I heard her talking so shamefully of me to Mark—actually traducing me to my own husband?" (Mrs. Sutton improved this episode, it may be mentioned, each time she reverted to it.) "Think what it would have been, Trixy, if I had married him for love!"

"I really can't think, Marian," Trixy said, dejectedly. "I am quite tired of thinking about it; and let her take Mr. Bathurst in Heaven's name," she added, suddenly; "I want none of them."

"Exalted sentiment that you will desert, it strikes me, if 'one of them' wants you, Trixy; if I were you I would just bear in mind what I said to you once about men with those heavenly blue eyes and their powers of falling in love with every lovable earthly creature they meet, accept the fact, marry him, and make the best of it!"

"Perhaps I should, if I were you," Trixy replied, and then Mrs. Sutton got up to go away, remarking, sweetly, "It was no wonder that Trixy got cross about it—why didn't she make a stand against that Lyon companionship at once and forever!"

"Because I have nothing to say against her," Trixy answered, plucking up a small spirit at parting, "because I really do like her very much—so much that I hate to hate her as you always succeed in making me, Marian, and—come now—because I think she likes my brother as well as he likes her."

"Then, good-by," Mrs. Sutton replied, with a shrug and a smile; "ask me to Haldon in the autumn, and get Mr. Bathurst to concentrate his energies on another picture, that it may be ready to be rejected next year, while I am there; his attentions rather bore me, good-by—come back with brighter roses in your cheeks, Trixy—pallor makes you look old."

So they kissed and parted.

Meantime, while Mrs. Sutton was kindly employed in making things pleasant by her sympathy and sisterly advice to Beatrix, Mr. Bathurst and Lionel Talbot were on their way to Haldon. It was not an eventful journey, therefore the events of it need not be chronicled. For the first hour of the journey the two men amused themselves over *Punch* and the morning papers. Then they tried to talk to each other, and failed by reason of having nothing particular to say, and each having much to think about; then they tried to sleep—a futile proceeding on a bright, clear June morning. Then they reached Swindon, and changed into a carriage where they were free to smoke and be happy for the remainder of the journey. At six o'clock in the evening they ran into the station that was nearest to Haldon; and at half-past seven a fly, procured from that station, rumbled up to the entrance-door of Haldon House.

It was a house that, at first-sight, seemed wanting in comparison with the grounds through which they had driven to gain it. The broad stone-bastioned gates, surmounted by the Lyons' crest, a hand holding a hatchet, admitted them into a wide turf-bordered drive. Far back on either side thick woods undulated up and down the hills through which the drive was deftly made to turn and bend in a way that deceived the stranger as to the extent of the park in the most honorable and picturesque manner. Gradually this drive lost its open character; the woods on either side thickened and contracted themselves upon it, and presently it took a bold turn round a precipitous bank down the slope of which an impetuous little rill gurgled, and passed under, along up to the principal front of the house, between two fine rows of beech-trees through whose foliage the sinking sun had a hard struggle to cast even so much as the reflection of one ruddy ray upon the ground.

The chief front was not imposing. The entrance door was a small Gothic mistake in the flat, plain, gray surface of that side of the house. The windows were narrow and unornamented, and there was nothing but arid gravel immediately under them. From the right end of the house a rolling sweep of lawn led the eye away to a silver lake, whose banks were fringed heavily with a great variety of flowering shrubs and drooping trees, every graceful twig and flower of which was reflected vividly in the limpid water below. To the left a high wall, running out straight from the house to a length of about one hundred feet inclosed the fruit and vegetables. And further away still, on the same side, a winding path, bordered with blocks of stone and huge trunks of trees, whose rugged surfaces were rendered beautiful by being covered with creeping plants, led away to the stables and out-buildings. In spite of that severely plain, somber-looking front,

there was both beauty and grandeur in this house, to which Mr. Bathurst brought his friend for the first time—the house that might have been Blanche Lyon's.

He had never been to Haldon since it had been his own, and now he was surprised to find how different an aspect it assumed to that it had ever had before. The sense of possession brought out all his powers of appreciation as he drove along the avenue and finally stopped at the door. Feeling elated, it was only natural to Frank Bathurst to give voice to his elation. "I wish I had let you come alone to prepare for them, Lionel!" he exclaimed, as he got out and turned his eyes on the lake. "I should like to have come down with them. I should like to see what they will think of it all as they come up."

"Can't you do that as it is? Go to meet them," Lionel suggested.

"No, no, that I won't do; I should have to go in a station cab—an ignominious way of going out to welcome them."

Then the door was opened, and their portmanteaus and themselves taken into the hall; a small band of much-startled servants, headed by a housekeeper who would have felt more pleasure at the sight of them if she had been prepared for it, came to meet them.

"The serfs are not glad through Lara's wide domain," Frank Bathurst said, laughing, as he went with Lionel into a room that the housekeeper declared to be the only one fit for use. "It will do very well," he added, turning to that potentate. "Mr. Talbot and I want nothing better until to-morrow; to-morrow we have a large party coming down, and then I should like the house to be in order."

This expression of his hopes brought a terribly long explanation upon him; but Frank Bathurst was one of those good-natured men who can listen to an "o'er-long tale" with a smile and a certain air of interest, even satisfaction. Mrs. Kennet had few servants, as he knew; the establishment had been greatly reduced at her old master's death. "It was fortunate—she would venture to say it was very fortunate—that she should happen to have her sister in the house just at present; her sister had lived cook in more than one place where they was that particular that she saw no fear of the dinners being satisfactory." Then another fortunate fact made itself known—her "sister's husband chanced to be there too—and (a still more providential circumstance) he chanced to be a butler out of place." In fact, luck seemed to be very much in Mr. Bathurst's path, for though he had come down without note of warning, fate was on his side; the two daughters of Mrs. Kennet's sister, both of them house-maids; both, by a strange freak of fortune, out of place, both pearls of great price, were "here in the very house, and might, no doubt, be persuaded to remain."

Indeed, the whole family were persuaded to remain, and Mr. Bathurst had every reason to take them at their relative's valuation, and be grateful for the boon of their services. Haldon was quite far enough removed from every other human habitation for an unexpected raid, such as its owner had made upon it, to be an inconvenience—more than that, a difficulty—to the one who had to cater for him. Mrs. Kennet was too replete with dignified sense of her own unspotted character as a manager to make a sign that might indicate a doubt before her young master. After putting the state of the household before him impartially, and making him feel the full force of the obligation he owed to fate and her family for the latter being there—she retired to bestir her inventive faculties about a dinner for the two tired travelers. It was all very well for her master to say "Anything will do for us to-night, Mrs. Kennet," but this was Wednesday, and she had nothing in the house for him, and if she sent to the village (two miles off) she could not count on getting any fresh meat. There was nothing for it but to rise to the occasion, and heroically sacrifice the supper she had designed for herself and her friends to the hungry, unwelcome, and unexpected ones. This being the case, it is small wonder that both Mrs. Kennet and her sister, who had to cook it now in another way for other lips, should have lost their tempers over the chicken and rabbit they respectively roasted and curried—or that the butler should have sighed over the vanity of earthly hopes as he was ordered away to the land-bailiff's house to fetch the key of the cellar, in order that the viands which had been designed for him might be washed down with generous draughts of wine by his master.

"They will have to work to get the place as I mean it to be by to-morrow night, won't they?" Frank Bathurst said to Lionel, as they strolled about from room to room, and marked the desolation and decay that had come over everything. "The library's good," he continued, opening the door of a dark, finely-proportioned room that was literally lined from floor to ceiling with books; "but it's too dull to venture in to-night; there's a small attempt at an ancestral portrait gallery in the corridors; shall we go and look at it and see if Blanche is like any of them?"

"If you like," Lionel answered, turning round sharply, and commencing the ascent of the stairs at once. Mr. Bathurst followed more slowly, still talking.

"I wonder what she will think of it all, Lal? it will be queer for her to come here and feel that she might have had it all if she hadn't been such a chivalrous little thing that she couldn't stoop to seem to fawn and flatter the poor old fellow. Not much—these pictures, are they? might be better lighted to, eh? Every one of them got in Wardour Street," he continued, lounging along in front of them with his hands in his pockets, giving a careless glance at each as he passed: "it's utterly impossible that Lely could have painted every one's great-grandmother, you know; no, not one of them a bit like Blanche. I shall get her to sit to me when she comes down, and give her portrait the place of honor in the gallery; in fact, I have a great mind to clear out all these and hang the Battle of the Bards here—fill the gallery with my own works. I'm not a Lyon,

so I'm not bound to respect these shams; I'll hear what Blanche says about it."

"She'll weed out a few of them willingly," Lionel replied, when Frank Bathurst ceased speaking at last; "but only transparent shams—any that are good she will give the benefit of the doubt."

"That's a good pose," Frank said, suddenly stopping before the portrait of a lady, and then stepping back to get a better light on it. "Look, Lal! there is something in that!—three blues—fillet, dress, and shawl all different shades—yet harmonizing perfectly; I should like Blanche to sit to me in such a velvet dress. Why, she has a bit of daphne in her hand!"

"And what of it?" Lionel asked indifferently. He thought the picture superb in coloring and composition; but he was tired of hearing Mr. Bathurst's artistic plans relative to "Blanche," and the daphne said nothing to him.

"It's about the most extraordinary coincidence I ever heard of," Frank muttered, as he tore himself away from the contemplation of the picture at last. Then he went on to wonder what Blanche would think when he showed her the picture, and her bright glance fell on the flower the lady held. Would it speak touchingly, thrillingly to her as it did to him? Then there darted through his mind a conviction that everything was tending toward the desirable end of Miss Lyon having what would have been her own had she not been obstinate. He—the happy possessor—was magnanimously ready to love and marry the woman who pleased his taste better than any other whom he had ever seen. She, judging from the daphne incident, was equally ready to love and marry him. Even the weather seemed likely to favor the wooing—how could the latter but speed fast and favorably in such leafy glades as were around on every side, under the clear blue sky and the warm, bright sun of June?

So he thought, as he walked lightly along, whistling a waltz, to join Lionel, who was standing looking rather dull at the end window. It struck Mr. Frank Bathurst as he came up that there was something rather inconsiderate and ill-timed in Lionel looking dull or feeling dull, when he (Frank) was just realizing how very happy and prosperous he was. The view of his own pleasant lands—the prospect of his own future bliss—the thought of the rich reward he was contemplating bestowing upon worthy beauty—were one and all such enlivening considerations that he felt Lionel to be wanting, in that he remained uninfluenced by them. A friend who showed himself slow to rejoice, whether he saw cause for it or not, when Mr. Frank Bathurst rejoiced, was not a friend exactly after Mr. Frank Bathurst's heart. "What's the matter with you, Lal," he asked, languidly, as Lionel continued to gaze gloomily out of the window; "are you thinking that this part of the country will do as well as Wales for the sketching tour in August? I am."

"No," Lionel replied; "I was thinking that perhaps we all work the same mine, rich as it is, too freely; I shall leave Wales to men who have something to tie them near home, and go to Algeria."

"Has anything gone wrong with you, Lal?" asked Mr. Bathurst, with a wistful look in his blue eyes, and a most unusual hesitation in his tones. But Lionel shook his head, and laughed so cheerily at the supposition, and met Frank's wistful eyes so dauntlessly, that Mr. Bathurst was quite reassured. "Let us go down by the lake and smoke a cigar by the moonlight," the master of Haldon said, taking his guest by the arm and leading him back along the corridor; "you frightened me for a minute, Lal, by talking of Algeria; whatever comes to me, old boy, I can't spare you."

Then they neither of them spoke again for some time, not until they had reached the border of the lake and sent up several light wreaths of smoke. Then Lionel Talbot looked back at the massive pile, the finest side of which fronted them now, and said:

"Whatever the autumn sees me doing, Frank, you ought to give up roaming; such a place as this deserves to be inhabited."

"Ye—es," Frank answered, lazily. The rippling lake at his feet, the star-studded sky, the beauty of the moon-lighted scenery around, were all shedding their soft influences upon him. His memories of by-gone days and nights under southern skies, by lovelier lakes, were dreamily reawakening. It was pleasant to him to think and remember; so he went on thinking and remembering, and paying no manner of heed to Lionel's suggestive speech. It was only one form—a harmless one—of his gay selfishness to be rather inattentive to anything that did not interest him at the moment.

"Who was the fellow who wrote something about a lake?" he asked, presently.

"Several fellows have written something about a lake," Lionel answered, laughing; and Frank withdrew his cigar from his lips for a moment, and said, as he sent many perfect rings of smoke circling away into the air, "I meant Moore. I was thinking of:

"By that lake, whose gloomy shore
Skylark never warbles o'er,"

and congratulating myself upon my lake being so much more congenial to my temperament." Then he strolled on a few yards into a broader moonbeam, and went on to remark on the fact of its being a "small wonder that the one for whom Mariana was weary should have kept her waiting so long, since Tennyson chose to plant her in a house where mice shrieked in mouldering wainscots, and rusted nails and broken sheds and other marks of desolation and decay abounded."

"It's just possible that Mariana might have been worth the braving all those disagreeable sights," Lionel said, pursuing the fanciful theme.

"No, no; the mistress of the Moated Grange must have been an untidy woman—a sort of Miss Havisham without the Estella; that sort of thing must have gone on for many years too, or the place couldn't have got into such a state—an old Mariana with her cheeks

fallen in and her hair thin, and a general air of dowdiness about her by reason of her dress being old-fashioned; that's what it would be if one realized the subject and properly painted it."

"Don't," Lionel replied.

"Well, I'm not likely to," Frank said; then he added, rather inconsequently, "but I was looking at that little island there, and thinking what a jolly sort of prison the Lady of Shalot had:

Four gray walls and four gray towers
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle embowers
The Lady of Shalot.

There we have it all. That laurel rises like a tower in the island. All we want"—

"Is the lady," Lionel interrupted.

"And we shall have her to-morrow night," Frank replied; he was thinking indifferently of both the beautiful women who were coming. But Lionel fancied that his friend thought only of Blanche. Perhaps it was that his fraternal pride was jealous about Beatrix. At any rate, he made no response to Frank's remark about her being there to complete the picture to-morrow night; and so the conversation flagged, and they soon felt that it would be well to go in.

"To-morrow night she will be here." This was the text on which Lionel Talbot preached a brief, bitter little sermon to himself, as he stood at his bedroom window looking out over Frank Bathurst's lawn and lake. "To-morrow night she will be here; she, with her keen eye for the beautiful, will be glancing over glade and alley, terrace and turf, lake and island; all will be spread out before her, and she will remember that all might have been her own, and then, naturally, she being a woman, her heart will warm to the man she has benefited; and the thought will arise that it may be hers still, and by the time the thought and the wish and the love she'll soon feel for him are realized—well, I shall be in Algeria."

It wearied, worried, tantalized, and perplexed him through all the visions of the night. "To-morrow night she will be here," that bright, brave, beautiful, young gentlewoman born, who had carried on the wearing strife so gallantly, who had never flinched at poverty, and to whom it would now come pleasantly and easily to be rich and happy at one stroke! It seemed to Lionel Talbot that Frank was just the man to win any untouched heart. He had pretty well fathomed poor Trixy's feelings on the subject, but Blanche's were beyond him. Love was often born of expediency, he reflected. On the other hand, Blanche was scarcely the sort of woman to create a sentiment out of an obligation. "God bless her! however it goes," he thought, as the gay dawn chased the languid June night away; and he fell asleep from sheer weariness.

Frank had remained awake a very little time, thinking so affably and kindly of every one of whom he thought at all. He was delighted with himself, for instance, for having thought of coming down and of collecting such a pleasant party as it promised to be. He was enchanted with Haldon! Of old it had never possessed half the charm and importance it now held for him. He had often suspected that there was a rich vein of humbug in that phrase that "the poor man who walks through a beautiful park has as much pleasure in the same as the noble lord who owns it." Now his suspicions were verified, and he was very sure, from the most agreeable experience, that he preferred being the noble lord. He was satisfied with Mrs. Kennet, and with his good fortune in coming into undisputed possession of such excellent servants, and with the prospect of the companionship of the two girls who were coming the following day, and with his own intentions respecting one of them, and with everything, indeed, save Lionel Talbot's resolve to go to Algeria.

"That won't do at all," he muttered sleepily; "we must all talk him out of that." Here his amiable intentions grew vague and undefined, and he slept the sleep that waits on sound digestion and an untroubled conscience.

The empire of the night was peace down at Haldon, but up in Victoria Street it was tribulation and woe for one of the members of one household. Edgar Talbot had been at home the greater part of the day. It was astonishing, he said to himself, how greatly the necessity lessened for being present at the centre of business action when a man decided upon putting himself beyond the possibility of attending it for some time. He had been happy, and cheerful, and "young," Trixy declared during the whole of the day. Very much to their surprise, he had attended the two girls on a little shopping expedition they made, and, still more, to his own surprise, he found himself liking it, for Blanche Lyon consulted his taste several times, declaring that Mr. Lionel Talbot's brother must know better than she did which color would go well with another. It was very flattering to him, Edgar Talbot felt that Blanche should think so highly of his brother. It made him think more kindly than ever of Lionel, and he always had thought kindly of and been affectionately disposed toward Lionel, be it remembered. He bought his sister a wonderful hat to wear down at Haldon, and exchanged significant glances with Blanche when the latter said that "it was just the shaped hat Frank liked—no feather tumbling over the brim to spoil that perfect outline." Then he had gone gayly home with them rather early than he wished, because they both declared that they had a great deal of packing to do, which must be done by daylight. "You don't consider what time muslins take, Mr. Talbot," Blanche said to him, when he pleaded that they "should go into the park now." "There's a sad want of proportion between the dresses we are going to make, and the trunks we are going to put them in."

"Why not go just as you are—you couldn't look nicer—and not trouble yourselves about packing?" he said, looking at their clear, crisp muslin robes.

"Ah, you don't know what mighty efforts are requisite to obtain even such small results. I should be sorry to answer for the effect on Mr. Bathurst's nerves if we appeared before him to-morrow in the damp of the evening in these dresses that now strike you as all-sufficient for the whole time of our stay. No, we must go home."

Accordingly, he went with them, and found Mr. Sutton waiting for him in a little room with a window in the roof, that was dedicated to interviews. One glance at his brother-in-law's face showed Edgar Talbot that there was something wrong.

"You have got rid of those—?" Mr. Sutton said, interrogatively, mentioning some shares in a projected railway from one little-known corner of the earth to one even more remote and less frequented.

"Not exactly; that is—" Edgar Talbot stammered, hesitated, and then cried out, "you don't mean to tell me it's too late."

"Read that," Mr. Sutton answered; and Edgar sat and read—in what words it matters not—it is sufficient to say that they told him that one of his barks of fortune was wrecked in port; one of his golden dreams had melted away, leaving him a very much poorer man, not only in reality, but in the knowledge of the world who knew of his investments.

He felt himself to be considerably crippled in his resources, and when he was able to realize it he confessed to Mark Sutton that he was so crippled, and that he regretted having tied the "millstone of this establishment" about his neck. "You'll right yourself in time, if you're prudent," Mark rejoined; "meantime," he added, feelingly, "it's a good thing, a very happy thing, that you're not married. Let Beatrix come to her sister; that will be a fair excuse for dispensing with Mrs. Lyon."

"Thanks; but I can't do that well," Edgar replied.

"Why not?"

"Oh, I can't do that well," Edgar repeated. He could not bear the thought of loosening any link that might be formed between Blanche and himself. In the midst of the sharp pain he felt at having lost a fortune there was alleviation in the thought of Blanche Lyon. The vision of her in her bright, bonnie beauty, as she had walked by his side that day, made him feel this life worth having, the eternal battle of it worth fighting. She was a good motive power. Other fortunes were to be won, and should be won for her. His was not by any means a nature to turn to pleasure and shirk pain. Still, now he could not help feeling that to-morrow was very near, and that then he would be on his way to flowery glades and forest green, with Blanche Lyon. For a while at least he would banish his business and turn his back upon trouble; for a while June, and Blanche, and flowers, and fresh air should have all his heart and soul. Mark Sutton marveled to see the ambitious young man bear the first blow—the first sharp reverse he had ever met with—so well. It touched the man, whose heart had ached sadly with sorrowful foreboding, when called upon to tell the tidings, that Edgar should receive them so steadily. It touched Mr. Sutton more to hear Edgar's parting words, "Good-bye, old fellow; I'm glad I haven't crippled you, anyhow!"

CHAPTER XII.

WEAVING THE SPELL.

PASTORAL pleasures have been sung in every key, and when circumstances render it desirable that we should leave London, it is wise and well to remember that "God made the country, and man the town." The greenwood glade, and the rippling river, the dark purple moor, and the sky undefiled by smoke, the peace, the purity, and the other privileges of the rural districts, have a good deal in them for which we ought to be grateful. But there is a reverse to the shield. It may do intelligent human beings good to be socially "desolate" at times. It does do them good indeed, for it throws them back upon themselves, and obliges them to assiduously cultivate their own best for distraction's sake. But it does not improve them to be "dumb" because they cannot, without permission, "speak in the congregation of fools."

Haldon Hall stood well in the midst of what was generally designated a "very good neighborhood." A fair number of county families had centuries ago been planted in the soil surrounding the Haldon acres—had taken root in the same, and in some instances had flourished exceedingly. Additionally, they were scattered about several more or less favorable specimens of "new men" who had in some way or other set their mark upon the times in a remunerative way. Moreover, in several instances the clerical office was filled by scholarly divines—men who had an apt Greek quotation to utter on every subject that was mentioned before them, but who for all that are only one shade less dull than devout.

Notwithstanding all these advantages, it may as well be acknowledged at once that it was a dull neighborhood—a neighborhood that was by no means wax to receive new impressions, however much it might resemble marble in its power of retaining them. It had never cordially approved of Mr. Bathurst's long-continued unbroken absence. It could not cordially approve of their presence now "under the circumstances."

The "circumstances" which were a stumbling-block in Mr. Bathurst's path to instantaneous popularity were Blanche Lyon and Beatrix Talbot, and his open devotion to the pair—devotion that was shown so gladly, frankly, and impartially, that Blanche quickly came to take it as much for granted as she did the sunshine, and Trixy to feel alternately gladdened and saddened by it as she had never been before by anything.

From the hour of Edgar Talbot's first appearance at Haldon it had been apparent to some of them that all was not well with him. He could not concentrate himself upon the present, casting all business cares behind

him, as entirely as was to be expected, considering he had been the mainspring of the move they had made into the country. The holiday for which he had so wearyingly sighed was evidently little more than an empty period in which he had a freer opportunity for the indulgence of undisturbed anxious thought than was his portion to have in London. Those who thought of him at all in the first days of the Arcadian intoxication which made them find the mere act of living all-sufficient, felt that "a vague unrest, and a nameless longing filled his breast." But even they did not stay to question the cause of it. Beatrix was sorry for him, but was not sufficiently intimate with her eldest brother to tell him that she was so. She was sorry that he alone of the party should be drawn in by some stern secret necessity from the lawn and the river and the wreathing roses of June, to answer letters which had arrived during breakfast and spoiled the same for him. "For all the good Talbot gets out of all this he might as well be listening to the last quotations in the city," Frank Bathurst said one morning, as, together with Lionel and the two girls, he sat on the bank of the lake. They had left Mr. Talbot in the library, writing quickly and nervously, and there had been that in his manner of replying to their solicitations that he would "come out and do nothing with them all the morning," which showed that his correspondence was of very genuine interest and importance to him.

"For my part, I believe that Mr. Talbot enjoys it quite as much as we do," Blanche Lyon said, smiling. "The sun and the scent of the roses both manage to get in at the window, so he can enjoy them, and make money, and despise us for wasting time simultaneously."

"And they are three pure and undeniable sources of pleasure; let us count up our joys, and see if we are in a position to pity him for not being 'one of us,'" Frank Bathurst replied.

"There shall be no reserves; we must set down each item of pleasure fairly. I wonder if we can do it!" Blanche said, with a blush beginning to rise on her face. "You commence, Miss Talbot."

Trixie shook her head. "No! what moral is there in being fair? What is the use of trying to analyze happiness? We can't do it—no one can do it; can we, Lionel?"

"Any how we can try," Frank Bathurst interrupted, before Lionel could reply, and Blanche encouraged him by saying:

"Hear the laughing philosopher! I believe you do know, Frank! I believe that you are the exceptional being who is neither above being happy or saying what makes him so. You don't vainly sigh after perfect elements that are never attained. We will hear your list first; it will nerve the rest. Now begin. You are happy why because?"

"That sounds like the answer to a conundrum, or the commencement of a game, 'I love my love with an 'S,' because he is stupid and not psychological.' My list of joys do you want! It is a short but all-sufficient one. I am with you in idleness and June!"

"The reasons we have assigned for Mr. Talbot's content are sounder," Blanche Lyon replied, coolly. "Now for yours, Miss Talbot!"

Trixie had grown pale as Mr. Bathurst spoke—pale with the pained consciousness that the man she loved was speaking words of flattery that were still words of truth to the careless winner of all his kindest thoughts. "I am with you in idleness and June," he had said, writing himself down by the utterance as much his own lover as Blanche's. "He was a selfish Sybarite," Trixy told herself as she looked at him lying there on the sward that was warmed by the sun—the sun that followed the fashion of sublunary things, and, as it seemed, touched Frank Bathurst more tenderly than it did the girl who was gazing on him with the yearning gaze of genuine affection—it dazzled, bewildered, scorched her; for when the heart is hot and restless externals are potent, then pleasure is a pain. Those words that he had said to Blanche Lyon were soft and sweet, gallant and gentle in themselves, and so only were what a man's utterance ought to be to a woman, but they sounded harshly and horribly in Trixy's ears. "I am with you in idleness and June." His list of the joys that made his life so pleasant a thing at this juncture began and ended in that one sentence. Trixy's heart ached as she took this truth home to it—but she went on loving him just as well as before.

"Now for your list, Miss Talbot," Blanche repeated; and Trixy replied, "I have none to give," impatiently. She was not at all well inclined to make a study of her own sensations, for she more than suspected that when too curiously inspected there would be seen the "little rift" which should by-and-by "make all music mute" in her soul. The request that she would name the causes which conducted to her happiness made her think, and when she came to think she knew that she was not altogether happy. She became conscious of being jealous, fearful, and hopeful at the same time—all about a man who told another woman that it was sufficient joy to him to be "with her in idleness and June." "When sorrow sleepeth wake it not," is a sound piece of good advice. Trixy resolved that she would not more thoroughly arouse the three passions that were tormenting her by investigating them, so she answered, "I have none to give," rather more decidedly than suited the nature of the conversation; and Blanche flushed rather painfully under the consciousness of being thought frivolous by Lionel Talbot's sister.

"Have you none to give either, Lal?" Frank Bathurst asked, getting half an inch further away from Beatrix and nearer to Blanche and a broader sunbeam as he spoke. Miss Talbot's tone had chilled him a little. His ear was very finely attuned, and Trixy's voice seemed steady unto sternness. The poor girl was in such terrible earnest that she could not seize each point and make the most of the cards she held, as a cooler headed and hearted woman might have done. Frank Bathurst liked to hear a sweet voice falter; it told him a tale

usually of feeling suppressed with difficulty and called into being by him. But Beatrix, who was faltering inwardly, made an effort out of that partly inherent, partly taught "self-respect" which makes women hide the dart which wounds them the deepest—she made this effort, and her tone seemed stern, "utterly devoid of that soft, sympathetic inflection which marked Blanche's," he said to himself, when Miss Lyon backed his appeal to Lionel by saying:

"Will you say you have none to give, Mr. Talbot?" And Lionel's eyes fixed themselves on hers as they had never done before, as he replied:

"Will you say that I am merely plagiarizing Frank's happy thought, when I give as my reasons for happiness the facts that 'I am—and am here'?"

"And they are enough—for the present," Blanche said, quickly. "At any rate they are the very ones I should have given if I had been clever enough to say exactly what I meant and no more; but you would soon want more than 'idleness and June'."

"You are not quoting me fairly," Frank Bathurst exclaimed. "You say Lionel would soon want more, as if he were very superior in his requirements to me. I also should soon want more than you have mentioned—you have left out the chief ingredient I named."

"Does he not utter false coin neatly?" Blanche asked, turning her head gayly toward Miss Talbot. In a moment the quick, kindly, womanly instinct made her glance away again, for Trixy, though she got out her "Yes, very," gallantly, had the tell-tale look of terrible earnestness upon her, and superadded to that earnestness was the dread that the coin might be real in which the flattery was paid.

"I have another source of joy," Frank Bathurst resumed. "The aborigines have not been down upon us overwhelmingly yet; I am beginning to hope that I have found the spot of earth where civilization is far enough advanced for a man to be credited with the sensible preference for dining in comfort in his own house rather than for going in discomfort to his neighbor's."

"We have only been here one week," Miss Lyon remarked.

"And how he might have suffered in that time—not from dinners, but from the anticipation of them! Women are never properly grateful for being neglected. For my part, 'Time's sands may cease to flow, false pleasures to delude,' ere I forget the claims of gratitude this neighborhood has established on me for letting me alone to enjoy myself in the way I like best."

"I am quite as alive to the negative favor shown as you can be, but I can not forget that we have only been here a week; this is Saturday. I prophesy that after our second appearance in church to-morrow we may as well go back to London for all the peace we shall know."

"Do you mean that the native hordes will pour themselves into our Haldon? Cease to exercise your prophetic gift, sibyl, if you can foreshadow nothing pleasanter concerning our future. 'Trained to the chase, my eagle eye' discerns unmanageable bodies of bores in the distance. You have made me very miserable, Miss Lyon; cast a further spell around me, and soothe me back to bliss again."

Mr. Bathurst gathered himself up from his recumbent position at his cousin's side as he spoke, and went into a half-kneeling posture at her feet; and she, falling into his humor for the moment, said, as she plucked a gorgeous crimson poppy from the bank at her side:

"Yours shall be 'the Childe's destiny.' I will bind this flower (it induces oblivion, you know) on your brow,

"I'll sign you with a sign:
No woman's love shall light on thee,
No woman's heart be thine."

"How can you say such things, even in what you call fun?" Trixy asked, in a low tone.

"I defy such spells," Mr. Bathurst said, as he bent his head lower before the lady who was fixing the poppy in his glengarry. And Lionel Talbot chanted:

"No mistress of the hidden skill,
No wizard guant and grim,
Went up by night to heath or hill,
To read the stars for him."

"What are you talking about?" Frank asked, impatiently.

"Showing Miss Lyon that I knew the source from whence she is drawing her spell; or the words of it rather," Lionel replied. "Are you going to promise him the 'brightest smiles that ever beauty were, and the friendship which is only not love,' Miss Lyon?"

"No," she said, throwing her head back a little, and holding her hand up to command attention still. "No, the last verse fits him best. Be grateful to me, Frank,

I charm thee from the agony
Which others feel or feign,
From anger and from jealousy,
From doubt and from disdain.

I bid thee wear the scorn of years
Upon the cheek of youth,
And curl the lip at passion's tears,
And shake the head as truth.

While there is bliss in revelry,
Forgetfulness in wine,
Be thou from woman's love as free
As woman is from thine!"

"Good!" he cried, jumping up, "while there is, and only while there is bliss in those things. Now you shall see me defy my bright fate. I will take weapons from the same armory and tell you that the web of indifference you have woven for me shall be rent;

"For I have learnt to watch and wake,
And swear by earth and sky,
And I am very bold to take."

"Do you believe me?"

"Yes, thoroughly; but you must alter before you will

be able to take anything worth having. 'The lips are lightly begged or bought; the heart may not be thine,' unless you alter and grow earnest," Blanche replied.

"We shall see. It would be against your own interest, and successful prophetess, to teach me to be earnest, I suppose?"

"I never could be in earnest with you," she said distinctly; and as she said so, a doubt as to the real destiny of the Daphne crossed his mind for the first time. Circumstantial evidence was strongly in favor of Blanche having gathered in the bloom he had wasted; but circumstantial evidence is false frequently, and "women are rum animals," he reflected, as he remembered all Blanche's past sweetness to him, and all her present cool assumption or the possibility of his never really loving or being loved.

He did incline to this brilliant plumaged bird very kindly indeed. Perhaps his reasons for doing so were not altogether above reproach; but at any rate, as reasons go, they are all sufficient for the purposes of this story. It was quite upon the cards that he should surrender his own judgment to her, if she would accept the charge, and feel no shame, but rather a conscientious satisfaction in so doing. He felt intuitively, without working out the problem "why it was so," that she was as good as she was fair; not an angel—far removed from anything of that sort, but a very woman, good and graceful too, and perhaps ever so little disposed to show that she was both things without effort.

"Good," and "graceful," and gifted with the power of putting herself in a good light before all men. Frank Bathurst prided himself much on the perfect tact which led the woman he was admiring (and who was doubtless admiring him) to make herself "charming" to Lionel Talbot as they walked up to the house. It may be that, if he had heard what the pair under consideration were saying, his appreciation of Blanche's tact might have been less perfect than it was.

"You seem to be well acquainted with Praed, Miss Lyon; what characteristic is it that has so won your approval?"

"I think it's his generosity," she answered, quickly; "I never thought about why I liked him, until you asked me; his rhymes all fall in beautiful order, and that pleases my ear, of course; but he's always kindly and generous toward us women, even when he lifts the lay of the jilted. He 'never will upbraid,' and that is so nice, because he had it in him to upbraid so bitterly. Do you know that poem of his, 'The Last'?"

"I know it," he said. They were some way ahead of Frank and Trixy now, and Blanche's beaming face was held toward him eagerly, inspired by the interest she felt in the discussion of the moral merits of Praed's poems. He knew a great deal about the girl in a minute. He fathomed much that she had felt and was feeling. He realized that life is short; and the truth of the aphorism that "the devil takes the hindmost" in most races came home to him. He was thrown off his balance, in fact, and so he spoke too soon, and he said too little.

"Yes, I know 'The Last'; my favorite verse at this moment is the fourth:

"I think that you will love me still,
Though far our fates may be,
And that your heart will fondly thrill
When strangers ask of me."

"My praise will be your proudest theme
When these bright days are past;
If this be all an idle dream,
It is my last!"

There was interrogation—meaning deep and intense in the tone in which he uttered these words. For a few minutes the woman's weakness conquered the woman's will, and Blanche Lyon, desperate in love, was feeble in action and insincere in word.

"If I dared, if I dared," she stammered; and while he was thinking that she dared not "love him still," and "proudly thrill" to his praise, because of some prior claim on her—while he was thinking still, and she was hesitating only because he did not bid her not to hesitate, the others came up, and the opportunity was gone.

He had spoken too soon. He felt that he had spoken too soon as he looked at the home they were nearing, and knew that it might be Blanche Lyon's if no one intervened between her and Frank. And she felt bitterly that he had said too little, and thought hard things of the social bonds which prevented her inciting him to say a little more, and found Frank Bathurst's animation oppressive, and was altogether indisposed to believe in the silver lining to this temporary cloud.

"Misfortunes rarely come singly: listen," she quoted, irrelevantly (forgetting that the others were ignorant of what she deemed a misfortune); then they all followed her example, and paused to listen to the sound of wheels, and presently a ponderous carriage swept round the curve of the drive, and they knew that the flood-gates of society were opened, and that their happy lotus-eating days were over.

"Let us be grateful for that it has been but a brief infliction," Frank said, when the visitor—a lady who had come in kindness to ask them to an archery meeting—had departed again, feeling very dissatisfied with Mrs. Lyon's fitness for the part of chaperon, and very much staggered at the perfect propriety which marked the demeanor of the daring Miss Lyon, who "had refused her father's request, and her uncle's fortune, and after all had now come down to try and catch Mr. Bathurst, so people said."

"I think her most pleasant," Mrs. Lyon interposed, hastily; "most pleasant and agreeable," she repeated, emphatically. And Frank replied:

"So did I; but you will understand that

It was frightful for to see
A lady richly clad as she'

when I came in, conscious of grass-seeds in my

mustache, and dead leaves on the back of my coat, and an all-pervading sensation of disinclination to speak to uninteresting people. Miss Lyon shared my sentiments. I could see by her face that she was bored—that we were sympathetic again, in fact."

He spoke half laughingly, half tenderly, looking at her the while with a clear, full gaze, that seemed to make sure of being kindly met and answered. He had often looked at her so of late, and Blanche had accepted the frank offering frankly. But to-day another had gone deeper into her soul than Frank, with all his bright-heartedness and easy satisfaction with himself, could ever go. She moved impatiently under his observation; she resented his declaration as to the sympathy between them. "Miss Lyon did nothing of the sort; she was bored about something else," she said, wearily. "Sympathetic! You are far away from knowing the meaning of the word if you think I was that with you just now."

"You are growing quite earnest in your denial. And don't I know the meaning of the word?" He was a vain young fellow, but there was something winning in his vanity, at most times, to most women—something specially winning in it to Blanche. But to-day she lacked patience for it among other things. She had known him for a butterfly all along, she told herself; and she had thought that a butterfly must ever be a pleasing and welcome object about one's path, whatever the weather. Now she found that sunshine was a chief condition: the butterfly was out of place now a cloud had arisen on her horizon! It irritated her that he should seek to put her in the position of understanding him more clearly than the others did, when she did not desire to understand him better. It roused her *esprit de corps* when he repeated, in his merry, vaunting, successful manner, "Don't I know the meaning of the word? More women have been sympathetic with me than I would care to count." Affectionately fond as she was of him, she could not resist replying when he said that:

"Leporello sings the list of names. A genuine Don Juan would scorn to proclaim his own doughty deeds."

"I was not boasting," he exclaimed, quickly. And his fair face colored like a girl's as he spoke.

"Were you not?" Blanche replied, carelessly. "There was a tone about the speech that we may be forgiven for having mistaken for boasting—may we not, Miss Talbot?"

"A tone you have never been hard upon before," Trixy replied. She saw his faults too; but she would have touched them so tenderly herself that it almost pained her to see them roughly torn into the light by another: especially did she dislike seeing them torn into the light by Blanche Lyon. It was hard, woefully hard, to Trixy to see the man she loved laying himself open to the feminine sarcasms of her rival; to see him accepting rebukes, rather than nothing, at Miss Lyon's hands; hard to mark him as so willing to put himself at Miss Lyon's feet; and perhaps harder still to mark that Miss Lyon did not deem it a priceless boon that he should be there. To be rivaled at all is horrible; to be rivaled by one who does not even deign to seem to care is humiliating. So Trixy Talbot said that Blanche "had never been hard upon that tone before;" and Frank's blue eyes sought his cousin's, and seemed to implore her to endorse the statement.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN HOUR OF BLISS.

THEY had all—she, the woman he loved, among the number—spoken of him and his possible occupation so lightly and carelessly down by the lake; and in very truth he had been knowing much bitterness. The shadow of the blow that had fallen was upon him, even when he came down to Haldon; but the blow itself had not descended until this morning, when he read at the breakfast-table that the company in which he had been well warranted, by most exemplary example, to have trust, had engulfed itself, and all who had faith, or at least money, in it, in unqualified ruin.

Edgar Talbot was not endowed with the *physique* that enables a man to rise up buoyantly under a sense of utter commercial discomfiture. Perhaps the men who can do this are about in the world somewhere, but it has never been my lot to meet them out of print; and as I seek to paint from the life I will tell of that I have seen alone. While his sister and his friends, and, above all, the women he loved, were down by the lake, "gathering" the odorous roses of love and youth, of idleness and June—while they were doing this, according to their different degrees, Edgar Talbot was going through several phases of well-developed agon and despair.

From the date at which he commenced thinking about life, and the responsibilities of life at all, he had set himself the congenial task of amassing such a fortune as should make his family (that is, himself) important and considerable. In the fulfillment of this resolve he had exercised self-restraint and denial of no mean order for many years. He had rigorously ordered his course, abstaining from much that was harmless because it was not profitable, and from a little that was profitable because it was not harmless, it may be added to his credit. He had held aloof from society, women, wine, and other expensive things; and he had his reward for this abstinence in being well reputed and rich at an age when many of his compeers were being repudiated for being such reprobates as to be compelled to retrench. It had been very well with him, in fact, when he first saw Blanche Lyon. Then he commenced perpetrating a series of mistakes. First, he fell in love with a "tocherless" lass with a long pedigree; then he made resolutions concerning her which he had not the power to keep; and, finally, he played higher than ever for fortune's favor, in order that he might afford such a luxury as Miss Lyon for a wife without cost to his own conscience. And now the end had come!

The end! Such a black, bitter, hard, ruinous end as it was too! He had lost all that was his own, and much that was not his own, and he knew that all would call him a fool, and some might call him a swindler. He had advised others to act as he had done, and the others would not now be slow to remember that he had so advised them. He had impoverished one sister, and left another penniless. He had no hope, reasonable or the reverse, of ever entering upon that exciting career which had been as the breath of life to him. His life, as it would and must be, stretched itself out before him in vivid colors and clearly-cut line; and he looked at it, and saw it as it was—a life of toil and obscurity—and knew that he must live it. His career—that which is to a man what love is to a woman—was dead, and he stood at its bier knowing that there would be no resuscitation. As this knowledge was driven deeper and deeper into his mind he went through some of the hardest pains of the most horrible Inferno. There was no compensation to him in any probable combination of circumstances that might befall him. Had he been able to realize it at once he would not have accepted the love of the woman for whom he had a passion as part payment for what he had lost. In one way it was all over with him, and he laid no flattering false unction to his soul on the subject.

Still, devoid as he was of that sort of half-poetic, half-weakly sensibility which makes some gentle-natured people turn tearfully to friendship and love in all troubles that assail them—devoid as he was of this, he did think once or twice, as he wrote responses to the notes of ruin which had sounded in his ears this morning, of Blanche Lyon. He did not tell himself that he should turn from ambition to love—find consolation in her caresses, and an incentive to ignominiously-obscure industry in her wifely smiles and womanly satisfaction, with the poor lot he could offer instead of the rich one he might have offered her. But he told himself that come what would she should be his wife, if he could get her. He was a practical man, barren of all poetical feeling to a degree that may or may not be rare, but that at any rate was great. He was also a passionate man, and his passion for Blanche was of the sort that made him feel that any fate which could be endured by him could be endured by her. She came into the consideration of his plans, which may be accepted as a proof that he loved her. Whether that love was selfish or not is a hard question for a third person to answer.

"Talbot looks as if he had had a tight time of it," Frank Bathurst muttered to Lionel, when Mr. Talbot came and joined them at the luncheon-table at last; and Lionel, looking at his brother's face, read there that it was even so as Frank said, for the signs of the warfare in which he had been worsted were about him still, visibly about him; even the ladies saw the signs, and were more subdued than the day deserved they should be.

"We're almost by way of being strangers some way or other," Frank Bathurst said, in continuation of the subject, later in the day, when he and Lionel were alone together; "otherwise, if anything is a little off the line, it might be righted again; but a fellow doesn't care to broach the business with a reserved man like Talbot."

"I am afraid something is more than a little off the line," Lionel replied. "Edgar is not a man to be beaten by a trifles, and he is beaten now. I'll give him a chance of telling me if he likes by-and-by; but I will not press him."

"Give him to understand that if I can help him, and he does not take my help, it will be a slight on your feeling for and interest in him, for you'll advise him to Lal, won't you?"

"Advise him what?"

"To let me help him."

"If he is beaten, as I fear, it would be snatching at a straw simply to take such help as you could give him, Frank; however, I shall hear."

He did hear him in time, but not that day; there could be no good gained, Edgar Talbot argued, by talking about things before he was compelled to talk about them. Lionel would know quite soon enough that his own £5,000 had gone the way of the bulk of his father's property. Trixy would play the cards she held in her hand better while her mind was undisturbed by the knowledge of the utter ruin in which her guardian brother was steeped. As Mr. Talbot thought this he seemed to see light in the darkness. His sister did hold good cards in her hand if she only played them properly. With Frank Bathurst for a brother-in-law he might even yet—

"Do you know what Bathurst has a year?" he asked abruptly of Lionel; and Lionel replied:

"About twelve thousand, I believe," and fell into a reverie on the subject of whether or not it would be shared by Blanche Lyon.

They never sat long over their wine after the ladies had left them in this arcadian Bohemia of Haldon. The daylight was but just dying off the sky when Lionel, followed by Frank Bathurst, came to the two girls in the drawing-room and asked, "Which was to reign to-night, moonlight or melody?"

"Put the alternatives more clearly before us, Mr. Talbot," Blanche answered, moving a little nearer to the window, which was open, as she spoke.

"Well, shall we go out on the lawn, or shall we sit by the piano, and hear Trixy and you sing?"

"You won't hear Trixy sing to-night, Lionel," that young lady put in, hurriedly.

"What does Miss Lyon say?"

"The lawn is so much sweeter than my own voice that I am going out to enjoy it," Blanche replied, walking through the window as she spoke. Lionel followed her willingly enough, and so it came to pass that Beatrix found herself alone with Frank Bathurst, or as good as alone, Mrs. Lyon being at the far end of the room fast asleep.

She was very fond of him—so fond of him that she forgave him all his little attentions to Blanche and all his little inattentions to herself, though both were very patent to her—so fond of him that she was ready, ay, ready, to hear the faint sound of encouragement which her own heart offered to herself as she marked that he did not seem very anxious to leave her and follow Blanche. Certainly he did say, "Do you not care for the lawn to-night?" but when she shook her head in the negative, and seated herself on the window-sill, he drew a low chair close opposite to her, and placed himself upon it, and looked quite ready to resume his old fervent admiration for her hair and eyes.

"Why will you not sing to-night?" he began.

"I am not in tune."

"Nor was I quite till I sat down here and looked at you. I am sympathetic, whatever Blanche may say to the contrary. Your low spirits acted on me; and now that you have brightened, I have done the same."

Beatrix felt her brow burning. She was conscious that she had brightened at heart when he planted himself opposite to her, and now it was made manifest by the manner of his gaze at her—a gaze in which there was a little appeal and a good deal of admiring audacity—that she had brightened in the face also. Feeling herself thrown off her guard, it was but natural that she should endeavor to disarm him, as it were. So she spoke of her rival, and spoke injudiciously.

"Miss Lyon cast a spell over you. Have you forgotten it?" she asked, significantly; and he accepted the double meaning, and disappointed poor Trixy by saying, laughingly, with the fresh, frank, outspoken vanity which eminently characterized him:

"Forgotten it—no, indeed; I have set myself a glorious task, Miss Talbot, to make the prophetess prove the falsity of her own prophesy."

"Glorious, indeed," Trixy answered.

"Shall I find it 'love's labor lost' do you think?" he asked, leaning forward and lowering his voice, and intensely appreciating the graceful bend of Miss Talbot's head as she sat with her cheek resting on her hand before him. It so pleased his taste to have the friendship and companionship and interest of lovely women that he almost felt inclined to take Miss Talbot into his confidence concerning his feelings for Blanche. But he forgot this inclination, or, at any rate, forbore to gratify it, when for answer to his last question Trixy gave a little angry sigh, and covered her eyes with her hand.

He loved beauty, softness, sentiment with all his heart and soul. If Blanche had not been before him there would have been a counteracting influence in her brilliant presence; but as it was, the seductive softness of that sweet, reproachful sigh made him forget every thing in the world but Trixy for a time. It was so very much a habit of his to get all he could out of life, to gather every flower, to listen to every sweet sound, to push every pleasant feeling to the verge, and at all times to let his fancies lightly turn to thoughts of love; it was so very much a habit of his to do all these things, that it never occurred to him that he might be playing with fire. So now, in accordance with the dictates of this gay second nature of his, he bent toward Beatrix, and asked her very tenderly if he had annoyed her.

"No," she said, "not annoyed me."

"What is it then?" he whispered. "Look up at me and tell me that I have not unwittingly said something that pains you." And then she obeyed him; dropped her hands down, and glanced up at him with her great loving eyes. And the beauty worshipper could but look lovingly and earnestly into her's in return, and feel very sorry that the lamp and tea would come in presently, and dispel the soft light and softer sensations—looked at her so lovingly and earnestly indeed, that she trembled at being so near (as she believed) to the bliss she craved, and so said she would "go and look for Edgar," and made as though she would rise as she spoke.

But he stopped her by putting his hand down on her's and saying:

"No, no, stay with me lady while you may,
For life's so sad—this hour's so sweet."

Then silence reigned, and as his clasp grew closer she forgot that "life is sad" in the sweetness of that hour.

"What a howling wilderness this will be to Lal and me when you'll go!" he said at length, and his speech slackened the spell, and Trixy felt herself able to command her feelings and release her hand.

"Oh, you will get on very well without us," she said, uttering a commonplace truth because it was the easiest thing to utter at the moment. Then the lamp and tea did come in, and Frank sprang up and offered her his arm, and proposed "that they should go and call the others in."

She accepted his proposal with a shy delight that was born of the hope she had that when once he got her into the garden he would forget the nominal object of their being there, and think of her alone. But as soon as they were outside he proved himself to be very much in earnest in the search by giving a series of call whistles, which were soon answered by Lionel. Then they all met, and the two young men sang a German student's song with an hilarious refrain, and romance was over for that night as far as Beatrix and Mr. Bathurst were concerned.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISUNDERSTANDING.

THERE had been nothing definite said either by Lionel Talbot or Miss Lyon during that stroll they had taken about on the lawn. But somehow or other it came to them both to have a great feeling of satisfaction and security about each other and the future before they came in to tea. The strain of the morning was not resumed; nevertheless Blanche could not make any complaint of there being a lack of harmony. For the first time Lionel Talbot spoke to her of his future,

assumed that she felt an interest in his hopes and prospects, and, "for the first time also," he said, he "began to take an interest in these latter himself."

"I shall never sacrifice the means to the end, or practice my art less worthily for being animated by the hope of mere commercial success attending it," he had said to her, and she had replied:

"I thoroughly believe you. I feel that it will always be impossible for you to seek any reward for the mere sake of the reward; but what has come to you that you should even think of 'success,' Mr. Talbot? I 'don't own you,' as old women say, when you utter such sentiments."

"Do they seem ignoble to you?"

"No, indeed, no; but the others, the ones I heard from you, or rather heard attributed to you, at first were so very different. I thought you were the sort of man to go on working forever, and to be very careless as to whether the work was ever known, or seen, or valued, or paid for, so long as you yourself had the satisfaction of knowing it to be good and true work."

"You must have thought me an unpractical idiot," Lionel said, laughing; "yet, to a certain degree, you judged rightly. I did love my art, with a perfect love that cast out every other consideration than its honor from my mind; now I know another love, and it shall ennoble my art, and my art shall exalt it. Do I still seem inconsistent? do you still refuse to 'own me?' or do you understand me?"

"I think I do—I hope I do," she had answered, hurriedly; and then Frank Bathurst's whistle sounded in their ears, and the talk about the translation of some of Lionel's theories came to an end. But Blanche had heard enough to make her feel sisterly and sympathetic toward Beatrix and Edgar. "Poor Mr. Talbot, he has been by himself, writing letters all day," she said; "one of us ought to take him a cup of tea, and beguile him back among us. You look tired, Miss Talbot; shall I go?"

She looked for an answer from Lionel, but he gave it quickly, remembering, with a pang, that it was the second time this day that Blanche had remarked on his brother's absence. Was his (Lionel's) claim upon her a vicarious one, after all? Was the interest she expressed for him but the offspring of the regard she felt for Edgar?

"It would be very kind of you to do it—very kind, indeed." Then he held the door open for her, and Blanche sailed away to the library, with a cup of tea in her hand, and the comforting thought in her heart that she was on the way to show a graceful, womanly attention to a man who was much to be pitied here where others were so full of the joy of loving and being loved, in that he seemed to stand outside it all.

It was a specialty of hers to sweep about softly, how ever fast and freely she walked. Her garments never rustled, nor did her silk dresses go off in crisp cracks as she swiftly moved about. Her step was so light and true, her progress so noiseless, that Edgar Talbot remained unconscious of his solitude being broken in upon until she gained his side and spoke.

"Mr. Talbot, I have brought you some tea, and I am charged with a special commission from the rest to take you back with me."

Then he got up from the chair in which he had been seated with his face bent down toward the ground in intense absorbing thought—got up, and took the cup from her, and then took both her wrists in his hands, and made her face him, which she did, wonderingly.

"You have come to me—will you stay with me?"

"Here? in this room? Oh yes, if I can help you at all."

"You can't help me," he replied, impatiently. The idea of any woman's assistance would have seemed against conceit at the brightest time; at present it seemed a suggestion fraught with the most contemptible folly. Still he was in love with the woman who had made it, so he contented himself with saying, "You can't help me at all;" and then adding, "except by staying with me, and hearing what I have to say. I have bad news for you—very bad news." Then he released one of her hands, and picked up a paper-knife, which he balanced cleverly on his finger, as an aid to eloquence, apparently, for when he had got it into perfect swing he went on, "I have bad news for you. I am not wrong in thinking that the tale of my ruin—or the ruin of all connected with me—will sound harshly in your ears?"

"Harshly! Oh! Mr. Talbot, horribly, horribly!" There was no aversion manifested in the horror she expressed, no falling away from him. Her face grew pale, and her eyes softened, but not unto tears, as she moved back a step under the blow he dealt. Then she gave his hand a good hearty grip—a sort of promissory note of friendship, should he ever need it—and went on. "It would sound so feeble if I told you that I am sorry, and the words would not tell you half that I am; women's words, and ways, and wills are so weak when it comes to the point." Then she paused, out of breath, with sympathy, and the reflection that he had said "all connected with him" shared his misery; and she remembered that it might be her's to have to comfort Lionel; and her heart rose freely to the task.

"Your words are not weak; I shall soon know whether your will is equally strong or not. Many a man situated as I am would try to work on your tenderness by telling you he was a beggar. I do not tell you this, for I never could be a beggar, and I don't like the figure of speech; but the lot that I have to offer a woman will be little better than a beggars in reality—will you share it?"

In very truth, versed as she was in all the signs of men's love, this came upon her as a surprise—a surprise that wounded, shamed, hurt her in some way apparently, for she bowed her head under it in no coquettish fashion.

"I would not have had you say such words for the world," she whispered presently; "forget them—for

get that I have heard them. Oh! Mr. Talbot, you have made me miserable?—and I have liked you so."

She spoke as one who was bitterly disappointed—as one who had steeled herself to bear ill news, but not such news as this. Edgar Talbot had never realized before that it is possible to put a woman to very painful confusion by proposing to her. He told himself that his cousin, Frank Bathurst, had been in the field before him, and he did for a minute or two, hate his host very heartily.

"You have seemed to like me," he said.

"And I have liked you, and I do like you so much—so very, very much—but not in that way."

"If I had said these words to you down at the Grange, when I knew you first—when I first loved you—your answer would have been different?"

"Yes, it would," she answered frankly, "for I hadn't the feeling, the liking for you had not come then to give me pain."

"And I was a rich man then."

"You do not believe what you imply," she said, indignantly. "Ah! my words are weak, indeed, for I feel that if I spoke forever you would not understand me; you do wrong me when you hint at your change of fortune influencing my feelings about you—you do, but you will never believe it."

She spoke seriously, standing before him with her fingers interlaced and her hands held down low before her. She had been humiliated at first by the feeling of self-reproach which assailed her for not having seen and stopped this before the words were spoken. But now she asked herself why should she suffer delicate scruples on behalf of a man who could misjudge her so meanly as Edgar Talbot was doing? His brother would not have done so; and at the thought of his brother she softened toward him again, and looked up to see if she might obey the womanly instinct to comfort him without being misunderstood.

It is a fact that a woman cannot for long think hardly of a man who either tells or shows her that he loves her, however lowly she may rate his regard. "Affection never is wasted," for if it enrich not the giver, it decidedly elevates the recipient in her own estimation, which is a reading of his verse never intended by Longfellow. In this case, though Blanche Lyon was honestly sorry "that it should be so," her sorrow was qualified by a certain pleasurable feeling of increased appreciation for the man who caused it. A woman is always sure to discover a few more commendable or admirable touches in the character of a man who avows that he loves her. So now Blanche remembered all that she knew of Mr. Talbot's best, and looked up and longed to comfort him.

He was standing, still carefully balancing the paper-cutter on his finger, still resolutely making it keep from falling a hair's breadth too much on either side. His present occupation contrasted forcibly with the experience he had but lately gone through—this was so little and they were so large. Yet she knew that he was not frivolous. It must be that what he willed to do he would do. And he had willed to love and marry her.

A sudden, irresistible, intense belief in the magnitude of a man's mind and the strength of a man's will swept across her soul, and her desire to comfort him was merged in a desire that he would not oppose or quell her in any way, or as she worded it to herself, that "he should let her alone." She felt very nervous before this man. Who had offered her marriage and accused her of mercenary motives. If he held to his course, and assumed her past interest in him to have been a sentiment which would have ripened into love had his fortune not changed, where should she be with Lionel when he came to hear of it? She would be regarded as a common-place, flirting, false, vain, interested creature by Lionel—as one who had angled in every stream for any kind of fish. The dread of being so made her miserable and brave at the same time, and she spoke earnestly and well.

"Mr. Talbot, will you be very merciful in your strength? will you forget what you have said, and let me forget it too, and be a friend to me?"

"That is the trashy cant of school girls and virtuous heroines in novels," he interrupted, impatiently. And she felt that if she would have her appeal heard she must make it very short.

"Well, then, will you keep this secret, because, if it were known, it would prevent the man I love loving me?"

"By Jove! you're candid."

"I'm more than candid, I'm audacious; and I know it. But I ask of you; will you keep my secret?"

"Most men would call it theirs."

"Most men would be wrong, then. It's mine, inasmuch as the betrayal of it would harm me more than it would hurt you; some of my friends would find it impossible to believe that I had not been to blame for more than blindness in the matter."

"You are great at making mistakes," he said, quietly; "now you are attributing all manner of fine feeling which he does not possess to the man you fancy you love. I know him better."

"You ought to know him better, but you know nothing of him if you say that."

"He will always seek what other men seek, and strive to win what other men want," Edgar Talbot went on, disregarding her; "his love is not worth the name; it will always flow in the courses other men open up to his vision; he's acting an unworthy part now toward you and toward"—He paused, and Blanche cried:

"Toward whom?"

"Toward another woman. I will not mention her name; you will know it in time. He's weak, vain, and impressionable—and you prefer him to me?"

"I have staid here too long," she said, turning to go; and then he followed her, and stood so that he barred her egress from the door.

"I have more to say, Miss Lyon, and you must hear it."

She bowed her head acquiescently, and then stood, resting her chin in her left hand, and holding the supporting elbow in her right hand, in that attitude of mingled resignation and impatience which is familiar to women.

"You shall hear it, and you shall not forget it. You will follow your own path now; mine seems too dreary for you to tread. You will marry; you will be happy for a time; then he will neglect you, and you will remember my love, and turn to it."

"Heaven forgive you these words!" She shuddered, and looked as though she could not be kind, as she prayed Heaven might be.

"Whether or not, they are spoken, and you will feel then that you have not been guiltless in this matter."

He spoke as if he were very much in earnest. She was woman enough to feel sorry for the sorrow that would be worded; she was also woman enough to feel sorry for herself. "Love turned to gall" in the bosom of Lionel Talbot's brother might prove a bitter element in her life.

"At least believe that I have not been guilty in design," she pleaded; "it never seemed to me to be possible that you could be thinking of me in the way you have done me the honor to think of me."

He shook his head in disbelief.

"What reason had you for thinking me so blind or so cold as not to see your beauty and be touched by your sympathy? You have seemed to like me; you have shown so marked a preference for my society, and so unmistakable an interest in my prospects, that I am justified to myself in expecting to have a different answer from you. I had discovered nothing in your character or manner to lead me to suppose you a weak, vain, or false woman."

"And you are not justified in judging me to be either of these things now."

"I will not judge you—at least I will not word my judgment of you, but I will ask you to judge yourself when I have put your conduct before you plainly."

"Mr. Talbot—not even the honor you have done me entitles you to take up the position of my accuser in this way; conscience free as I am, I am still bitterly sorry that I should have been the means of leading you to make a mistake: that is all I can say—I am bitterly sorry."

"Not so bitterly sorry as I am, not that I should have 'made a mistake,' so that it should 'be a mistake'; you are the first woman on whom I have set my heart—you will be the last, yet you can calmly tell me, 'I have made a mistake, and that you are conscience free.' Miss Lyon, men do not 'make mistakes' nor are women 'conscience free' in such cases; we call acts criminal that do not carry such a train of evil consequences with them as of yours."

He looked so quelled, so miserable, so hopeless, and reckless as he said this that she longed to soothe him back to better feeling, both for his own sake and another's. But she dared not do it. The man had charged her plainly with having before this shown signs of love for him which she had not felt, and she could not tell him that the love had been not for him but for his brother. She must be content to be reviled and rebuked, maligned and misunderstood for a time. So she accepted his last harsh words in silence, and when he ceased speaking she tried to pass by him quietly once more.

"Don't go yet," he entreated, in softer tones than he had used heretofore: "from this night mine will be a black, barren road; bear with me patiently now."

The altered tone broke down her hardly-sustained resolution. She turned to him with all a woman's tender pitifulness in her blushing face and tear-filled eyes.

"Mr. Talbot, you will break my heart unless you tell me you forgive me for having added to your troubles. I shall never be happy again if you do not promise me to go out to meet your altered fortune brightly and bravely as a man should."

"Such going out is easy in theory."

"And in practice too! Ah! you smile; but I am not speaking as a fool entirely without experience."

"You speak as a woman."

"I grant that—as a woman should speak who has fought a long monotonous fight without hope of glory, and who feels that she can fight it over again on the same, or even harder terms, without repining or regret."

"Fight it with me; the terms will be harder, but you have the heart to fulfill them gallantly."

"It cannot be now. I wish it could. I think it would if I had known you as I know you now before I had got to love some one else better than my life. 'Hard times!' I'd fulfill the hardest willingly with the man I loved who had the courage to say the hard truths to me that you have said."

"Do you mean that for consolation? because if you do, I must tell you that it falls short of your intention."

"I scarcely know what I intend it for—yes I do; I intend you to understand through it that I understand and sympathize, and, to a certain degree, regard you very warmly—hard as you have been on me—cuttingly as you have tried to make me feel that I have been weak, and vain, and false." Then she paused, came down from her impassionate height, and added, "What will they think of us in the drawing-room?"

"They will 'think'—naturally enough—that the one who came to seek staid to comfort me; they will 'know' nothing more, unless you tell them."

"You do think very poorly of me."

"No; but I think it more than possible that in some unguarded moment you may utter the truth concerning me; not in the spirit of a vaunt; you will not boast, but the day will come, surely, when you will feel proud of having gained my love, and then you will tell that you rejected it."

"Never!" she exclaimed, earnestly. "It is much to

be proud of, I know that; but my pride in it makes me proud for you." Then the present difficulty beset her again, and she asked, "Had I not better go back to the others?"

"And gratify any curiosity they may be feeling by looking agitated; no, go up to your own room if you wish to be spared question and remark." Then he stood slightly on one side, and she knew that she was free to pass him, and then the will to do so immediately left her, and she hesitated. This was a crisis in their lives; she felt sure of that; things would not go on after it as they had gone on before it; and she remembered only what had been pleasant in the lately past period, she sighed and regretted, and wondered what would be altered.

"May I feel sure that we part in kindness?" she asked.

"If I told you 'Yes,' the telling would give your mind, or conscience, or heart, or whatever chances to be vexed on my account, no ease when you came to reflect on it; kindness does not overflow the heart of a man when he finds himself balked at every turn; it is being given a stone when one has asked for bread, to be offered kindness instead of the love I wanted—the love I looked for from you."

When he said that in just the same tone in which he had previously said that she "had seemed to like him," she lingered no longer, but went away as he had suggested, to her own room, where she speedily became absorbed in the perplexing question of whether or not the love of one brother would militate against her interests with the other? The result of the debate between hope and fear was, that pity for Mr. Talbot became submerged in anxiety about her own love; and then she suddenly cast all selfish considerations aside as the remembrance struck her that the fortunes of the Talbot family were at a low ebb—that Edgar, the head of the house, was a ruined man.

CHAPTER XV.

BROTHERLY COUNSEL.

THEY had all begun to speculate silently in their own minds as to what could be detaining Blanche long before Mr. Talbot walked into their midst, which he did very soon after Miss Lyon left him.

"Where is Miss Lyon? I hoped she would be here to give us some music," he said as he came near to the table round which they were gathered. And when Beatrix had answered, "Why, Edgar! we thought she went to the library to you," the difficulty which Miss Lyon had foreseen as to what "would be thought of her in the drawing-room," was got over to all outward seeming, for no further remark was made. Later in the evening she came back to them, and then Mrs. Lyon insisted on their all being struck with the fact of Blanche looking as though she had a headache, and Mr. Talbot quoted Schiller to himself to the effect that "against stupidity even the gods fight in battle."

Mr. Talbot had gone through a hard task this night. He had pleaded earnestly—ardently for him—for the love of a woman in the face of fortune and her avowed preference for somebody else. The task had been very hard to him, but as he entered upon it after much deliberation, so now he had no self-reproachful thoughts about the manner in which he had performed it. Whatever there was of mistake or mortification in the matter ought to be and was with her. He had not been led away by his own feelings more than by her manner. "She had seemed to like him," and in such seeming there was shame for her, not for him, since it had ended in this. On the whole, deeply as he loved her, and desperately as he desired to win her even yet for his wife, there was more justice than mercy in his judgment of her. He used no shallow euphemisms in naming what he conceived to have been her conduct to himself. She had been guilty of the despicable guile of "tender artifice, and flattering lure, and feigned interest," so he thought, and she had used these despicable means for the more despicable end of luring him into a false position. As she sat before him trying to be as she had been hitherto to him and to them all, and he thought these things, he felt pitiless toward her, and toward that lax modern code which suffers a woman to pursue such a course, and still considers her pure.

It was a heavy secret for her to be weighted with, this knowledge which he had imparted to her that commercially his career had come to a close. It made her feel most pitifully tender toward the rest, and specially pitiful toward him, the luckless head of the house who had wrought its ruin. Her heart ached as she glanced furtively at him, and guessed what some of his hopes had been, and fathomed a good deal of the hopelessness that was his portion now. But she dared make no sign of such tenderness and pity, for she knew that did she do so the others would fall to wondering about the reason why she came to be better informed than they were, and he would misconstrue her again. So she sat and glanced furtively at him now and again, and wondered when he would be frank with the rest, and she would be free to speak some of the sympathy she felt.

The following day, long before he intended being led into it, the discussion of the subject was forced upon Edgar Talbot by circumstances. Contrary to his usual custom, he went away to the stable with the other two young men immediately after breakfast, instead of, as usual, shutting himself in the library, when Mr. Bathurst occupied himself, and strove to interest his guests, by enlarging on, and showing off, the beauties and excellences of three new riding horses. Soon Mr. Bathurst was away on one which was reputed to be a famous fencer, along a slip of turf whereon a few hurdles were put up for practice; and the two brothers, as they sauntered after him nominally to watch his progress, suddenly found themselves on a topic which had a fatal fascination for them both.

"That mare is too slight for Bathurst," Edgar observed, as she visibly flagged on a space of marshy turf, and Lionel replied:

"He has an idea of giving her to Miss Lyon."

"Has he that? Then Trixy's chance is over, for Miss Lyon will accept the mare first, and then the man. She has played with a most shameful cleverness; until last night she did not know which of us stood to win; then I frankly put myself before her as a ruined man, and she enacted surprise and confusion, and made the usual plea of misconception of my intentions." Then he grew more bitter under the sting of being so soon superseded, as he imagined, by a man whom he regarded as something infinitely lighter and less worthy than himself, and added, "Blanche Lyon is a clever woman, but her tactics are transparent to me and she will repent them."

"God bless and prosper her, whatever they are!" Lionel interposed, heartily. "But you, Edgar! What do you mean by placing yourself before Miss Lyon as a ruined man?"

"That I did it—that I am one;" and then Lionel uttered an interjection, and then the whole story, at least as much of it as could be told, and was necessary to be known, was narrated by Mr. Talbot.

The elder brother did not put himself in the position of one who has erred, and repented before Lionel. "I did what I thought was best for the family, and my judgment has been proved faulty." He said when he had finished, "If I succeeded, you would all have benefited as largely as myself by my success; as I have failed, I shall be the greatest sufferer. I wish I could be the only one."

"Don't feel that I am a sufferer in the affair at all," Lionel said, feeling that he was called upon to say something. "Such plans as I have made will carry themselves out without let or hindrance from this business, save so far as Trixy is concerned."

"Trix will still be my charge," Edgar replied, firmly, and he was very much the head of the house still as he spoke. "Trix will be my charge. I shall begin at the foot of the ladder, and she must be content to take her stand there with me. I could have wished that she had married Bathurst. As it is, the best I can do for her I will do; Miss Lyon has put it out of the question that any wife of mine can interfere with my sister." When he said that he smiled with a sort of cruel triumph over himself, and Lionel knew that his brother was sorely wounded by this woman whom they both loved.

"You think Miss Lyon has given you reason to feel wronged by her decision?" he asked.

"I have not a doubt of it—not a doubt of it. I am not a man to falsely construe every little feminine artifice into a special flattery for myself; she meant me to believe what I did believe."

"She has a very gracious manner," Lionel said; and at that gentle protest against further censure of either Miss Lyon's motives or manner Edgar Talbot grew irritable.

"I tell you," he said, "that she meant me to believe what I did believe—that she would marry me if I asked her; she spurns the notion of being considered mercenary; but now—after seeming to like me as no other woman has suffered herself to seem within my experience—after this she has refused me, pleading her love for a richer man as a reason why she can not marry me. 'Gracious!' Such graciousness is devil-born."

"She did give you that reason?"

"She did—gave it out with what she herself rightly called more audacity than candor."

When his brother, said that, Lionel Talbot once more determined that Algeria should be his sketching-ground during the ensuing autumn. For himself, it was not his habit to consider that any thing was owed to him on account of that "graciousness" of Blanche's. But for his brother! He was fain to acknowledge that if Edgar nothing extenuated, nor set down aught in malice, he had been wronged by this woman, whom Lionel could still only pray might know many blessings and much prosperity.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DAY-DREAM.

"SOONER or later they must know it all; so the sooner we come to an understanding with the women about all this the better," Edgar Talbot said to his brother when they found themselves at the extreme end of the slip, with Mr. Bathurst so far in advance of them as to justify them in no longer feigning an interest in his performances with the bay mare he designed for his cousin. Mr. Talbot, as it will be seen, did in no way seek to involve any other than himself in the tangle of wrecked fortune and strained responsibility in which he was caught. Still he did find it a slight "something to lean upon," that knowledge he had that in the coming explanation Lionel would be near to aid him verbally, at any rate.

"Sooner or later they must know it all, therefore the sooner the better," Lionel answered, and in that answer there was a touch more of poetical feeling than of sound common-sense. For a time—say only for a few days—matters might with safety have stood where they were. No one could be benefited by any immediate and absolute declaration of the necessity for a complete change, and it was well within the bounds of possibility that some might be worsted by it. "Trix will be my charge still—that, of course; but she must rough it. When she came to me I hoped to give her a good establishment until she gained one for herself. Now all that is at an end; still she is my charge, and I shall fulfill it."

"You will let me help you?" the younger brother asked.

"No. As things have turned out, I can take no man's help with regard to Trixy. I, who have done her the

injury through my over-zeal, must be the one to make her amends; besides, she would still be within sound and sight of that fellow, if she cast in her lot with you, and she, like me, will be better away from them altogether."

Then the brothers spoke of Trixy's too evident love for the man who loved Blanche Lyon better than their sister—spoke of it delicately and with reserve, and in a way that proved to each that the other felt the common family honor to be his very tender care, and finally came to the conclusion that, since nothing better could be devised, it would be well to leave Haldon without delay.

But not to go back to London. The man who had lived in luxury there shrank from taking his sister back to some draughty suburb to live in cheap obscurity. "If it were not for this about Blanche, I could desire nothing safer and better for Trixy than to live on with Mrs. Lyon; but that will hardly do now—Trix could not stand it."

"Neither of the girls could stand it, if Blanche marries Bathurst," Lionel suggested. "Miss Lyon is a quick-sighted woman, and a tender-hearted woman; she would never agree to testing poor Trixy cruelly; but we are, after all, arguing on insufficient grounds; we do not know that Blanche cares for Frank; that gracious manner of hers is shown to us all alike."

"She made no secret of caring for him," Edgar replied, emphatically; "she spoke as plainly as a woman can speak; far more plainly than a woman ought to speak." Then he bent his head down and brooded over the words she had uttered, and was as sick at heart in his angry outspoken love and wrath as was Lionel, whose hopes had been raised with far more cause. There was no unselfish consolation to Mr. Talbot in the thought that the woman he loved was escaping a black, barren-looking fate by refusing to marry him. He had a theory that such love as was his to give was all-sufficient to brighten the darkest road to any woman. Therefore now he girded against Blanche for leaving him to travel it alone.

"She made no secret of caring for him—she spoke more plainly than a woman ought to speak." Lionel listened to these words with a deep conviction that they were ringing the knell of happiness for him. Last night that sweet graciousness of hers made his future seem so bright, his work so noble, his aim so lofty, his prospects so many! Now he knew that it had been shown to him because he was Frank Bathurst's friend.

Many women being imbued with the amiable, though weak notion, that it recommends them to Damon to be agreeable to Pythias.

"Have you thought of letting Trixy go to Marian for a time?" Lionel asked.

"Not while I'm alive and in authority; moreover, Marian will not be too likely to stretch out a helping hand just now, for this last business has dipped Sutton considerably, and she will be sure to attribute his reverses to me; no! until her daughter's altered prospects causes Mrs. Lyon to take a gorgeous tone I shall take it for granted that she remains Trixy's chaperon. I shall get into harness at once myself, and then I shall know what arrangements I can make for them."

Then Lionel urged once more that they should stand or fall together, bringing forward, in support of his claim to help, that the mistress he served rewarded her honest votaries in a right royal way; and still the head of the house refused the cadet's claim, and declared his intention manfully of sufficing to himself and his sister.

But although Mr. Talbot would share this actual practical responsibility with no man, so long as it could be considered his property, he still did shrink from the more puerile duty of telling his sister that he had been short-sighted or luckless rather. To Blanche Lyon he had told it out boldly—not being altogether unconscious that there was something inspiring and touching in the manner of his telling it. Blanche Lyon was very much endowed with the love of all that is chivalric and daring, and there was something very daring in Mr. Talbot's tale and the tone in which he had told it. As she had said to him, if she had not already loved another man better she could have found it in her heart to love him very well indeed. She was sympathetic to that power he possessed of bearing the worst, and bearing it buoyantly, not stolidly; and he knew that she was thus sympathetic, and so he was able to speak out to her as became a man.

But with Trixy he felt very differently. Truth to tell, he knew little more of his sister than that she had lovely violet eyes, and a large luxuriant figure, and a lady-like bearing that entitled him to hope that she would marry very well. He was proud of her, to a certain degree he was fond of her, but he was not at all acquainted with the tone of her character or the turn of her mind. She had been a delightful sister to him while he had been well off, and hoping to be still better off. But whether or not she had it in her to hear of such a reverse as he had to tell her of without looking crushed and reproachful he did not know.

So it was borne in upon him, partly by reason of his selfishness, and partly out of that natural dislike to the sight of tears which most men have, that it would be well for him to so far avail himself of that offer which Lionel had made, as to make the latter the messenger of evil to Trixy. "As you were saying, the sooner they all know it now the better," he remarked. "I don't mind your telling Trixy this morning; we shall not go back to Victoria Street; if she has a preference for any particular part of the country it will be as well that I should know it before I leave here, and then I may manage it for her."

"The telling will come better from you, I fancy," Lionel replied, in all simplicity, not because he shirked the unpleasant duty, but because he really thought that it would be better for Edgar to receive the solace of Trixy's sorrow and sympathy with him at first hand. Then Mr. Talbot, being too proud and stubborn to ask a second time directly for what he had indirectly at-

tempted to bring about, said, "Perhaps you are right," and went back to Haldon in no pleasant mood.

He left Lionel still leaning against the hurdle at one end of the slip, dreaming a day-dream—a dream that was incongruous in such a place at such a time. For the glories of summer were over the land now. The odors of wild thyme and roses, of mignonette from many a sheltered garden, of clover from many a shelving field, of meadow-sweet from the banks of the purpling stream, the ever-sounding ripples of which permeated everything; all these fragrances mingled and intensified themselves in the golden sun-fraught air, and were wafted around and about him by a sighing wind. And the grass under his feet was green, thick, and springy; and the sky above him was bright and decked graciously for the eyes with fleecy clouds of silver gray; and the bee hummed an accompaniment to the air the stream sang; and the world was as full of beauty as the man's heart was full of care.

So in the bosom of that gorgeous mother, at the shrine of the god whom all artists adore, at the feet of that royal mistress who never spurns a loving slave, so here alone with Nature, Lionel Talbot dreamt his day-dream, and it was something after this wise:

"The spell she wove in idleness for Frank she has wrought in reality and bitterness for me."

"No woman's love shall light on me,
No woman's heart be mine."

The sun shone on still, and the lark sang, and the bee hummed, and the river rippled just as though God's grandest creation, man, had not been making man's most unnatural vow. In the utterance of those two lines Lionel was binding himself to celibacy in the event of Blanche Lyon marrying any other than himself. Meanwhile Blanche Lyon and Frank Bathurst were coming to an understanding.

CHAPTER XVII.

BY THE LAKE.

THE mare which Mr. Talbot had declared to be "too slight for Bathurst" had carried that gentleman far away from the brothers' long before the conversation which has just been recorded had come to a close. She had visibly flagged, as had been narrated, on a piece of marshy, spongy turf and then she had got herself together, and gallantly borne him over a hurdle and away on a slightly sloping piece of ground into the extreme edge of the Haldon parkland. Then he had pulled up, quoting to himself the line, "This is the place—stand still, my steed. Let me review the most eligible way of getting back to the house without falling in with those fellows again. I don't want that now." This he said to himself breathlessly, looking about him for a short cut back to the house. Presently he saw one that looked promising—an elm-tree avenue in full foliage, through which he could gallop unobserved by any one who might be on the high lands adjoining. "Oh, ride as though you were flying!" He sang out the refrain of the brilliant Irish ballad heartily as the mare bounded into her stride, and the goal he sought was brought nearer to him each instant. As he went along, conscious of looking well in the blue unclouded weather, swinging easily and gracefully to each movement of the mare's, he felt rather sorry that Blanche was not near to see him; and the feeling was not an extraordinarily conceited one under the circumstances, for with his Glengarry bent down low over his brow, his handsome fair face glowing with the sun and the exercise, and his bold blue eyes brilliant with excitement, he was no unworthy object merely from the artistic point of view.

A groom came out as he clattered hastily into the yard, and as the mare was led off with heaving sides and seething flanks, he turned to go toward the house, and met Blanche.

"What a mad rider you are, Frank!" she said, reproachfully; "why such haste when the very air is languid? How you have heated that poor horse!"

"I was anxious to get back," he said. And then Blanche tried to pass on nearer to the horse, and he offered her his arm to stop her progress. "Never mind the mare now; she has been on probation to-day. I have been putting her through all her paces, in order to see whether she will suit you or not. I have decided that she will suit you—so she is yours."

She shook her head.

"You are really gorgeous in your generosity, Frank—a sort of man who would order round 'more carriages' with as grand a grace as the Irish magnate did. She must not be mine, however, the pretty darling. I should have a slight difficulty in keeping her in furnished lodgings in town."

They had sauntered slowly out of the yard while she had been speaking; and now they had reached a bend in the drive from whence two paths—one leading direct to the house, the other bearing away to the lake—diverged. She half inclined to the former path, but he whispered:

"No, no! come down by the lake."

"I am afraid of a sunstroke," she said, putting her hand up to her bare head as she spoke. "I rushed out without a hat to get a few flowers; and then I saw you and forgot my flowers in the agitation your furious riding caused me."

"There's a depth of shade under that old ilex that will secure you from all fear of sunstroke. Do come, Blanche."

He moved on with his left arm clasping hers as it rested on his right arm, and she was constrained to go with him.

"What have you done with the Talbots?" she asked.

"Oh! never mind the Talbots," he replied.

"But I do mind about them particularly," and then—she could only think it, she dared not speak as

one who knew—she went on; “I am afraid things are not going as well with Mr. Talbot as his friends could wish.”

“I am afraid that there is something wrong with Master Edgar,” he replied carelessly, “but he’s such a queer, close fellow, one can never make out what he’s after; however, as our thinking about it won’t help him, we had better not think about it, eh?”

“Frank, you are so funnily selfish,” she said, laughing; “there is a grain of truth and honesty at the bottom of every selfish remark you make which causes me to regard it more leniently than I should otherwise do, sir; still you are selfish, and it is a pity.”

“I will take the rest of your rebukes sitting down, if you will allow me,” he replied, smiling; “there is a place for you, here on this mound by the roots—the light will fall on your chignon in a most marvelous manner, and your face will be in shade; so I may sit here?”

He seated himself close by her side, even as he asked it; leaned on his elbow, and looked up very lovingly into her face. “I wish you would let me go and get my hat,” she exclaimed, turning her face slightly away from his bent, earnest gaze.

“No, no, no!”

“There you are! selfish again! it pleases you that I should sit here and scorch my brains because the light falls, as it seems good to you that it should fall, on my chignon.”

“Blanche! not for that only.”

His tone was a little more serious than any she had ever heard from him before. She looked round at him quickly and scrutinizingly, and then said:

“For some equally frivolous reason, then, I am sure!” Then, “Forgive me, Frank, for saying that. I really beg your pardon, but you are so much what a brother would be to me that I cannot help talking to you as if you were my brother.”

“I don’t seem to care to see that sentiment strengthened,” he said, dryly.

“I am sorry for that, for it has been strengthening daily from the day I first saw you.”

“What did you think of me when you saw me first?”

“I almost forgot—no I do not—I liked you, and felt as well-disposed towards you as one does toward the majority of people. Natural affection does not develop in an instant, you know.”

“I don’t care what natural affection does, but the immortals love each other at first sight, and love is of them.”

“I am sure I shall get a sun-stroke,” Blanche said, hurriedly; “if you would only let me go and get my hat I should like you so much.”

“Perhaps you would not come back?”

“Yes, I would.”

“Perhaps you would not come back alone?”

“Well, it may occur to you to remember that Miss Talbot may find it dull alone with mamma.”

“Not a bit of it; she will find it delightful with mamma; at any rate, I find it delightful that she should be up there with mamma while I am here with you. Come, Blanche, don’t be so restless; you give your society for hours to Talbot or to Lal, and you grudge me a few minutes. I want to talk to you about”—

“About what?” she interrupted, laughing. “I can tell you without you taking any trouble: you want me to speak to you of ‘Tannhauser,’ without waiting for any replies from you; you wish to enjoy the sun in silence, and as you know that I am well contented to hear myself speak, you will condescend to listen to me.” She tried to rattle on, without giving him the opportunity of saying a word; but he divined her motive, and frustrated it.

“Quite the reverse,” he said. “As a rule, you are right in supposing that while you spoke I could desire no better occupation than to hear you; but on this occasion I want to speak, and you must listen.”

“How well the house looks from here!” she said.

“Yes; the remark is peculiarly relevant to the point I was discussing, is it not?” he answered, smiling. “Queer it is that we should be sitting here looking at the house that would have been your own if you had not been over-proud and over-generous to me.”

“Not over-generous to you. I knew nothing of you; you were a name to me. ‘Bathurst’s boy’ papa used to call you.” Then the remembrance of the proposition that had been made with regard to “Bathurst’s boy” by herself about herself shot across her mind, and she blushed and laughed.

“The man is very grateful for the good you gave the boy,” he said, softly; “I almost feel as if I owed myself to you, Blanche. What an obscure fellow I should have been if you had seen and conquered old Mr. Lyon!”

“Poverty, or, at any rate, want of wealth, is not necessarily ‘obscurity,’” she replied.

He shrugged his shoulders, as if he rather doubted the truth of that aphorism.

“You would have been an equally good, and perhaps a far greater man, if you had been left to your own devices, Frank, than you will ever be now; you have nothing to be grateful to me for.”

“Give me something to be grateful for,” he said, winningly; and he put his white, well-shaped hand on hers, as he spoke. “Will you give me something to be grateful for? will you ‘Blanche?’”

“Yes; I will give you excellent advice—do not resent it. Remember what I said to you the other day when we were all down here—recall the spell I repeated, and the remark I made about it.”

“Is that your advice?”

“Yes.”

“Why do you offer it?”

“Why, indeed!” she said, with an assumption of a careless air. “I think I can give you a cogent reason, though. I should like to see you grow earnest, for, as I told you, ‘the heart may not be thine, until you do so; and it is a pity to wait-over long for it, for Trixy’s heart would be well worth having.’”

“Is that your advice—that I should endeavor to gain Miss Talbot’s heart?” he asked, and if he had not been Frank Bathurst he would have looked mortified. Being himself, he merely threw an additional imploring expression into his eyes—an expression which Blanche steadily resisted, for the reasons that have been already assigned.

“Indeed I do—if you can.”

He threw himself back with an air of confidence on the subject that was not quite pleasing to the woman who loved Trixy Talbot’s brother. “Frank, you are woefully conceited, I am afraid,” she said, reproachfully; “and I feel rather guilty, for I know that I have aided in making you so.”

“No, not at all; your conscience is quite clear on that score,” he replied, almost bitterly; “you have been kind to me; but this morning you are determined, for some reason or other, to make your manner counterbalance all that kindness. I feel very much rebuffed.”

“Now you make me feel guilty of injustice, folly and rudeness. Why should I rebuff you? To me you are all that the kindest brother could be; let me regard you as such, Frank; it will be such a comfort to me.”

“But it will be no comfort to me,” he replied. “It is all very well, Blanche, but Platonic affection breaks down between friends, and fraternal affection will not answer between cousins, when I am one and you the other party concerned; if I had never seen you, I should have fallen in love with Trixy Talbot; but I seen you, and I’m a gone coon.”

She would not take it as a declaration; she would not allow him to suppose that she could for one moment think he intended it to be expressive of a desire to marry her. She did not belong to that order of women who look upon every word, even of avowed affection, as a step toward the alter. So now she began to sing out, sweetly and blithely, the words:

“Thy words of courtly flattery, such fall like morning dew; For oh! love takes another turn, the tender and the true. Liking light as ours was never meant to last.

It was a moment’s fantasy, and as such it has passed.”

And when she sang that, Frank very wisely resolved to cease from further tender treatment of his subject that day.

But he was very far from giving up his point; for all his gay, light manner, for all that habit of seeming never to care for one thing long, he had great tenacity of purpose, especially when, as in this case, obstacles arose where least they had been expected. The hare that doubled most frequently was the one he most cared to course; the deer that gave the hounds a hard run was the one he loved to follow; and the woman “who warned the touch while winning the sense” was the one he wished to woo, and win, and wed.

“Is she afraid of being seriously regarded too soon?” he said, coaxingly, when Blanche had quite finished her little strain. “Melodious Mentor! tell me the way to be tender and true according to your song.”

“Like ‘the Douglas,’ ” she exclaimed, eagerly changing the topic. “‘Douglas, Douglas, tender and true!’ Oh, those dear old border ballads. Why have we no bard to sing likewise in these days? In place of those genuine rhymes we get verses of society that small critics are good enough to call Praedesque.” Poor maligned Praed! why should he be made to suffer such folly?”

“As what?”

“As the tinkling lines that choke the magazines. We have lost our guileless belief in the ‘brave and noble,’ and so none are found to sign it. We have lost our genuineness in most things, and specially in the artistic part of our nationality; have we not, Frank?”

“I have not given my mind to the subject very seriously,” he replied, demurely; “but I do not think that we have lost our ‘go’ in poetry or in any other branch of art; there is an immense amount of fervid trash written and published, but a few young lights are rising up whose blaze is hot and clear.”

“But no one to be compared with Scott, or Byron, or Shelley—whom I don’t half understand.”

“Scott, whom you mention now with such wholesome awe, was named less reverently by his compeer in ‘English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.’”

“And Shakspeare, Milton, Dryden, all forgot; Resign their hallowed bays to Walter Scott.”

“Time tries all, you know. A few of those whom you now look upon as producers of mere ‘tinkling lines’ may be found to have good metal in them before the century is old.”

“I wonder whether there is anything in it all?” she said, in a low voice. “Sometimes it all seems such vanity and vexation of spirit, and nothing is worth any thing, and all is emptiness. Were the mighty men of old happy, I wonder? Homer did not enjoy life a bit more for his works living on through all the ages. Do you think he was happy?”

“I should not be surprised to hear he was not,” Frank answered, lazily. “The fellow who wrote the ‘Art of Love’ (from experience, let us suppose) must have had a jolly time of it; but the knowledge that he is to be learned a few hundred years hence by little boys who object to you can hardly add to any man’s happiness.”

“Frank,” Blanche Lyon said, suddenly turning her head towards him as he lounged at her side, “you’re nice, and witty, and shallow—frightfully shallow. I am sure if I had been a man I would have done something good with my life, for I have a horror of hearing the little things that we say in joke about the mighty things that have been. I lack veneration for many things; I know that, but I do respect so many things that you treat facetiously because you fail to understand them.”

“That’s all Lionel Talbot talk—treated accordingly,” he said, laughing. “Lal is a charming fellow, with an

immense fund of faith in the true and the beautiful, and all the things that are generally written with capital initial letters; and you have picked up some of his notions. ‘Done something good with your life if you had been a man,’ would you? What a boon it is to the rest of us that you are only a woman, and so not that colossal bore, a shining example! Here’s a chance for your ameliorating the mental condition of your suffering fellow-creatures still—do something good with my life. I am quite ready to place it in your hands.”

“Were my brain steady I might think of accepting the charge, but the sun has been too much for me. ‘Oh! ilex-tree—oh! ilex-tree, how faithless are thy branches!’ They have let the rays in upon me, so that, if you would not see me grow red and unbecoming, you will let me go in out of the way of them.”

“It is a mistake to say ‘man never is but always to be blessed;’ that applies especially to women,” Frank said, impatiently. “I thought we were very happy here, so of course you find it too hot. Well, I am your slave, Blanche; we will go in if you like. I will always do what you like.”

He had taken both her hands, and was lifting her up from her sitting posture as he spoke, and she was looking up gladly and gratefully into his face—gladly and gratefully! and he fully deserved that she should shower such glances upon him, for he had been very generous in saying no more when she had given him to understand that he had said enough. As she fairly balanced herself, and stood steadily upon her feet, Lionel came over the crest of the bank that rose up from the water, and Blanche blushed with the miserable consciousness that beset her, of seeming other than she was; and the two men felt that the trip to Algeria, which Lionel had contemplated, would be a desirable thing after all.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“THOU ART SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR.”

WHEN Mr. Talbot went back to Haldon, leaving Lionel leaning against a hurdle, he (Edgar) was, as has been told, in no pleasant mood. He had suggested that his brother should bear the burden of the bad news to his sister, and his brother had, in all single-mindedness, pointed out to him that to do so was his, the elder’s, part. Mr. Talbot was far from feeling convinced that this was the case; at the same time he was equally far from being capable of again hinting his desires on the subject. Accordingly, he went back to the house just about the time that Frank Bathurst and Blanche emerged from the yard, and the glimpse he caught of that pair lazily sauntering away toward the water did not brighten his temper or his bearing.

He found Beatrix sitting by the open window, down on the threshold of it, in fact, in the same position she had occupied on the previous night, when Frank Bathurst had faced her—looking eloquently all his fervent admiration for her hair and eyes. She had a little work-basket on her lap, and an open book on a chair immediately by her side. But she was neither reading nor working actively—she was thinking, and her thoughts interfered with her executive power.

“Can I speak to you here, without being liable to interruption by Mrs. Lyon at any moment?” he asked, lifting up the open book, and placing himself on a chair by her side. “If not, come away somewhere else, Trixy.”

“I can account for Mrs. Lyon for the next hour; she has gone down to the village, to look at a cottage that is to let.”

“What on earth for?”

“Blanche—Miss Lyon told her this morning that a friend of hers might possibly want a small country house soon; and Mrs. Lyon, it seems, delights in house hunting. So she made inquiries of the servants, heard of this cottage, and has gone off to look at it.”

“And can you account for the others?” he asked, carelessly; but he watched her with furtive keenness as she began trifling with the contents of her work-basket, and answered:

“Miss Lyon has gone out to gather flowers—the others went out with you, did they not?”

“She is gathering flowers that bloom unseen by us, then, for I saw her going down to the lake with Bathurst as I came in. However, that is not what I wanted to tell you Trixy. The truth is, things have gone very badly with me, and it is time you should know it, as you will be a sufferer.”

She looked up, startled and affected as much by the tenderness with which he addressed her as by the tidings his words conveyed; but before she had said anything he went on in a peevish tone:

“Don’t go white and red about it. Of all things I hate a scene. The less said about my business the better, since no amount of talking can set it straight. I have been unfortunate to an extraordinary degree, having lost not only my own money, but all Lionel’s and a good deal of Mark Sutton’s into the bargain.”

He interrupted him here by holding her face up to kiss him; as he bent down to her he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

“For mercy’s sake don’t cry, Beatrix,” he muttered. “I can stand anything better than women’s tears. It is hard on you—very hard on you, I allow that, but you shall feel the change as little as possible—that I swear.”

“Oh! Edgar, do you believe that I am thinking of myself?” she asked reproachfully.

“Of course I do—it is only natural and human that you should think of yourself. It is a bad thing for you; a very bad thing. In a little time, had I been able to hold on, you probably would have been independent of me. Is that chance over Trixy?—tell me honestly.”

“What chance?” she asked, crimsoning painfully.

“We have come to such a pass that it is feeble of you to attempt to evade my natural anxiety about you out of false delicacy. How do you stand with Bathurst?”

“Edgar! how can you ask me? If I stood in any

other relation to him than is apparent to all the world, should I not have told you? or rather, would he not have told you so?"

"I am not so sure of that—about him, at least." Edgar Talbot said, shaking his head. "Now, look here, Trixy—you like him; of that I am sure. I shall more bitterly regret my loss of fortune on your account that I do already if it were the means of separating you from him. I have been very plain-spoken with you—far more so than I should have been if I did not feel that, even at some cost of fine feeling to you, I am bound to make you all the reparation I can make. Be equally candid with me. Would it not be agreeable to your wishes to live down here for a time with the Lyons, rather than to return to a less comfortable home in London than you have known hitherto."

"To live down here!—no, no, no!"

"Not here at Haldon, but in the village. I am not the one Miss Lyon had in her mind when she spoke of some friend of hers possibly soon requiring country-quarters."

"How did she know?"

"Because I told her last night."

"How you all rely on her judgment!" Trixy cried out bitterly. "I thought till now that it was only Lionel and Mr. Bathurst who turned to her on all occasions, as if she were the best guide, philosopher, and friend they could possibly have. Now I find you give her your confidence before you give it to me."

"Circumstances compelled me to give her my confidence. I want her mother to continue with you still," he answered, evasively. "And now tell me—what objection have you to remaining down in this neighborhood, provided a suitable house can be found? Victoria Street must go—I tell you that fairly; and I do not think it will be to your interest or to mine to take you into an inferior metropolitan locality; besides, it will be cheaper here."

"Why not some other neighborhood?" she urged.

"And why some other neighborhood?" he replied, "It will save time, trouble and money if I can establish you here with the Lyons; should any change arise it will be easy to take you away."

"What change are you contemplating?"

"Well, to put it broadly, and in such a way that we may both fully understand the other—should Bathurst marry Blanche Lyon, I can quite feel with you that the village would be no fitting residence for you; but we do not know that this is likely to be; and, therefore, unless the plan is positively painful to you, I shall ask you for my sake to agree to it."

"I submit entirely to your judgment," she said, coldly. It seemed to her that her brother was betraying a callousness as to her feelings in the matter which lessened his claims on her affection, however it might be about her obedience. He was evidently determined to play her—his last card, however she might suffer in the publicity of such staking, and however keenly she might be wounded if he lost. Plainly as he had spoken to her, she had not been able to bring herself to speak with equal plainness to him in return. He had assumed that she was in love with Mr. Bathurst and she had not denied the assumption. On the other hand, she had not acquiesced in it even when he had said that he "could quite feel with her that the village would be no fitting residence for her in the event of Bathurst's marrying Blanche Lyons."

Inconsistent as it may appear, after the cool manner of her submission having been commented upon, Beatrice Talbot was conscious of being glad that she was not to be entirely removed from the society of the man she loved. The inconsistency is admitted, and the artistic propriety of it defended, for in real life the great majority are consistent only in inconsistency of feeling, if not of action. Some subtle adjustment of her sentiments regarding Frank Bathurst made her glad that she was not to be taken away from his atmosphere altogether; at the same time, she was sorry that any other than himself should have proposed her remaining in it. Moreover, she was partially rejoiced and partially grieved, in some intricate way, that this social convulsion was coming about. Matters settle themselves differently after such throes and dissolvings of former habits; and she argued, after the manner of women, that the worst which certainly might ensue would be better than this unquiet in which her heart now dwelt. So she thought, comforting herself for a few moments after her last speech to her brother, and then she began to stab herself again by picturing what she should do, and how she should feel if, after she was safely settled in the cottage with the Lyons, Mr. Bathurst came and took one of the inhabitants thereof away, leaving her (Trix) to solace Mrs. Lyon's declining years. It was not a pleasing picture, but it did not last longer, fortunately, than such painful mental paintings are wont to do. A sweeter subject, in more glowing hues, spread itself over the canvas of her mind presently, as she thought of the night before, and how he had looked at her when he had declared himself to "be sympathetic, whatever Blanche might say to the contrary."

"Edgar, I will live wherever you wish me to live, and be as happy as possible," she said, suddenly, in quite a different tone to the one in which she had previously agreed to his desire. Then he got up and went away, thinking that it was impossible she could have looked so absurdly hopeful all in a moment if she had not some reasonable foundation for believing that Bathurst was in earnest about her.

"If Blanche Lyon should elect to go away," he said to himself, "Trix would carry the day: he can't resent the 'present' soft influence." Then he despised Mr. Bathurst very heartily for that power of loving all that was lovely, which was so eminently characteristic of him, and at the same time made up his mind to adopt all the means he knew, in order to compass the desirable end of getting Frank Bathurst for a brother-in-law.

Meanwhile the trio who were left a short time since on the sloping bank, looking at each other, and each

wishing that the other was not there to be looked at, had met and spoken as civility dictated, and had withdrawn these things with a degree of embarrassment that gave a false appearance to what was really an innocent situation. It may fairly be questioned whether any body ever came abruptly upon a pair of human beings without the surprised and the surprised looking as if something untoward had occurred. In reality, Blanche Lyon was very glad to see Lionel; his presence relieved her from the necessity of continuing that flow of words without meaning, which she had let loose in order to save Frank from going too far and putting an end to their cordial relations as at present existing. Perhaps there is no greater bore to the woman who does not want to marry him than a man she likes should persist in hovering perilously near the brink of that precipice—a proposal. His attentions, his devotion, his warm regard, are all such pleasant things that she cannot help wishing to keep them on as they are. But the serious offer of his hand and heart is quite another matter, one that intensifies the poetry of the proceeding only to kill it the more effectually. For I hold it true that as it is impossible for a woman to think other than warmly and kindly of a man who has let her know that he loves her, so it is impossible for a man to think other than harshly of a woman who has suffered him to drift into the declaration when she can make him no fitting return. In the court of love there is no appeal against love turned to hate, wounded vanity, and the sense of having been lured into a false position. Blanche Lyon recognized these truths, and so, as she did care very much for Frank Bathurst's liking and regard, she was glad that, though he had very distinctly given her to understand that he loved her, he had not put her in the place of either having to reject or accept his love as a thing which must last her all-sufficiently through time.

Still, though she was glad the interruption had come, she wished it had come in another form than in the person of Lionel Talbot. She knew very well that he was not at all the sort of man who sighs for that which ought not in honor to be his; he had not at all the order of mind which covets his neighbor's possessions. For some men's minds, the fact of there being a *soupçon* of doubt as to the ultimate end of their endeavors to create interest in the breasts of the women who most interest them has a fatal fascination. For Lionel Talbot Blanche Lyon feared it would have none. He was not one to sigh to prove himself a stronger man than the one already in occupation of that citadel which, according to his creed, could only be fairly rendered up once—a woman's heart. He would be incapable of running a race for any favor with any man, more especially with his old friend, Blanche thought, sadly, even as she talked brightly to both the men as they walked one on either side of her up to the house.

Without being deceitful or desperately wicked, Blanche's heart was made of the material that never suffers its owner to say die while a possibility of living exists. Even when she was miserable she would seem to be happy, partly out of pride for herself, and partly out of good feeling for others. "I cannot bear to be pitied for being depressed, or to depress others by looking down-hearted," was the reason she had once given when rebuked for an external air of joyousness that did not accord with what her mamma declared she ought to be feeling on some melancholy subject. So now, in accordance with the dictates of this considerate creed, she seemed to be very much at ease, very gay, and full of vivacity, when she was in reality restless, nervous and unhappy.

One of the chief causes of her disquiet was that, after this, her relations with Frank would of necessity be altered. She thought that it would be impossible for him to be as he had been before to her. Though he had saved himself from actually asking her such a direct question as would have involved her giving him a direct answer, he had suffered such a tone to creep into the conversation as could have left no reasonable doubt in the mind of either as to the other having perfectly understood the position. And she was sorry for this—more sorry than she would have been had she more clearly fathomed Frank Bathurst's mind and feelings. It was not in him to give serious thought to what was over or to what was inevitable; it was not in him to regret anything for long, or to bemoan himself for having wandered into any sort of error, provided he could get out of it gracefully. On this occasion he told himself, with some truth, that he had got out of it gracefully. The sweet things he had said to Blanche would never be regretted by him; he was far too gallant to repent him of the utterance of tender words to a woman.

Moreover, as he walked on by her side, looking down upon her bare head as she moved it in its uncovered glory from side to side, alternately addressing Lionel and himself, as she did this, and he was struck afresh by the beauty of her rounded cheek and clearly-cut profile, he felt far from sure that he had made a mistake after all. Blanche was just the sort of woman to exact a considerable amount of wooing before she would show herself ready to be won; she would never make a mistake and show that she expected something serious when there was nothing serious coming; she would use her womanly prerogative to the full; freely as she might flirt, she would not go out meekly half-way to meet an offer of marriage. All these things he told himself, recovering his spirits most perfectly during the telling, waxing more charming and satisfactory to himself and his companions as he became more charmed and satisfied each instant with the view of the case which he was offering for his own inspection. He banished all memory of the advice Blanche had given him—her advice that he should gain Miss Talbot's heart if he could. At least he only remembered it as a superfluous sort of thing, reminding himself as he did so that signs were not wanting to prove that the "endeavor" would be a work of supererogation, since Trixy's heart was already

manifestly well-disposed toward him. Trixy Talbot had it not in her to carry on the war against an intruder's suspicion of his intrusion on a secluded scene being an untoward event, in the way Blanche was doing it now. He could but admire her, and her perfect acting of a part for which she would never have been cast if the choice had been given her.

One grand condition of woman's success was always hers; she dressed with a perfect taste that always gave her a feeling of security and ease. She never permitted herself to be liable to the weakening influence of the knowledge that her effort was marred by an ungrateful line or an unbefitting color. It is next to impossible for a woman to be anything but awkward in a costume that violates the harmony of either proportion or hue. Blanche never did herself so much injustice as to let herself be put at such a disadvantage.

So now she moved along secure in the primary condition of ease—she knew that from every point of view she looked well. Her luxurious rippling hair was banded with fillets of the clearest mauve ribbon; her transparent floating dress was of the same color; her waist was well defined by a satin band, and the lace round her throat and wrists was narrow, neat, and straight enough to satisfy the most rigidly tidy. As she walked she raised her dress a little in front, and then coming out from under the white drapery were seen a pair of small, highly-arched feet cased in black-ribbed silk shoes. Both these men who looked upon her were artists, and though one preferred painting wild waves to women, it was hard to say whose taste she most thoroughly satisfied.

"Did you ride far, Frank?" Lionel asked, as they got themselves in line and turned toward the house. Then he remembered that his question might seem to them to savor of a desire to know how long they had been together, and he was hastening to add, "I mean how did she carry you?" when Blanche calmly answered:

"He could not have ridden far, for he has been back with me a long time. I went out to the stable-yard to meet him, and then was gracious enough to come on here, risking a sunstroke without my hat; you never can be sufficiently grateful to me, Frank."

She said this by way of proving to Lionel that there really was nothing behind this outward show which had evidently discomposed him when he came upon them by the lake. He will understand that if there were anything particular to me in Frank's having come back to me soon, that I should not have mentioned, she thought, and simultaneously Lionel was thinking, She is honest, at least; she wishes me to at once understand the terms they stand on with each other.

"I rode far enough to find the mare perfect; worthy even of the one for whom I design her."

"What a conventional expression, Frank! I hope the one for whom you design her will give more of her attention to the gift than to the manner of the giving, unless you strike out some more original form of words."

"You are the best judge of that."

"Of what? How vague you are. Well, never mind your meaning now; I want to say something to Mr. Talbot while I remember it; how very few people speak closely—say just what they mean, and no more."

"Edgar does, I think," Lionel replied.

"Yes, Edgar, Mr. Talbot, does indeed. He says out his meaning a little more plainly than is well at all times. Frank never does, of course not. He flatters, don't you, Frank?" she questioned, laughingly.

"You say so."

"And yours is not close to your meaning conversation, Mr. Talbot," she continued; "it's suggestive talk—the best of all."

"Now that you come to critically analyze the nature of my conversation, I remember that I say very little," Lionel replied.

"Shows what an attentive listener you have in Miss Lyon that that little has made such an impression on her," Frank Bathurst put in good-humoredly. There was an utter lack of jealousy, and of all the littlenesses that proceed from jealousy, about this man that was infinitely taking.

"I like suggestive talk and suggestive verse," Blanche went on, stoutly disregarding Frank's application; "that is why I like 'The Wanderer,' and all the rest of his books."

"All the rest of whose books? 'The Wanderer's?' I don't know him."

"No, Owen Meredith's."

Frank laughed and affected to shiver.

"Save me from suggestions of early loves and primrose faces who suddenly start up from graves under cypress trees, to disturb a man's peace of mind, when he is enjoying 'Trovatore' in Paris; you have a ghoulish taste if you incline to him—I am not with you there."

"Are you not with me in my admiration—no, not my admiration—my love for that poem, Mr. Talbot?"

He shook his head.

"I don't think I either love or admire the mixture of the very commonplace and the impossible."

"But then nothing commonplace has a place in that poem; it's all love, and luxury, and light."

Lionel laughed.

"The love of Paris, and the light of gas, and the luxury an upholsterer's apprentice can catalogue; no, no; it's garish; you will feel it to be so, if you compare it with the supernatural element that comes out so gravely in 'Faust,' for instance; there is a noble suggestiveness about that which all who run cannot read, unfortunately."

"Say fortunately, rather. 'Faust' is not for the masses," Blanche said, letting her head go up haughtily.

"Pardon me, it is for all humanity; it is like one of the great Bible stories to me—a thing to be read humbly and solemnly."

"Fancy reading anything that a man wrote who was

addicted to heart-rending flirtations between high rows of well-covered pea-sticks, with plump German maidens, humbly and solemnly!" Frank said, scoffingly.

"He was essentially human," Blanche said, apologetically; for all his great genius one can get near to him, after reading that wonderful biography—he was so very human."

"He was essentially selfish," Frank put in, warmly, "and rather mean about it, I can't help thinking, after reading that wonderful biography which has turned your brain a little, Blanche. Whenever distracted maidens or prudent parents sought to bring him to book, he took refuge in the clouds, as it were, soared up to Parnassus, and roosted there until the storm blew over."

"His shortcomings ought to be glossed over, ought they not, Mr. Talbot?" Blanche asked.

"I think not," he replied; "surely not 'glossed over'; you do not mean that; but regarded as evidences of how the mighty may fall, and as special reasons for lesser ones to continually pray against being led into temptation."

"After all, genial follies are readily forgiven," Frank said, with an abrupt change of feelings about the subject under discussion.

"Yes, by those who do not suffer from them," Blanche said, hoping that the amendment would find favor in Lionel's eyes.

"And even by those who do suffer from them. They blamed not the bard, though he did them most frightfully amiss," Frank put in, affably. "He was his own ideal man, and he makes the ideal woman wail for him in her dying agony—those last words! it was worth being born to have heard them."

"Last words! how grand some such utterances have been! More light! The sentence is a poem in itself."

"The craving for fuller intellectual satisfaction, for clearer mental vision, appeals to you," Lionel said to Blanche. "Do you remember some that are equally striking in a simpler way?—the last words of the Christian gentleman who said in his dying hour to his son-in-law, 'Be good, my dear!' I like them better than any others I have ever heard; they are, in themselves a full, perfect, and sufficient rule of life—it's all summed up in those four simple words."

"After all, it is easy enough," Frank said, in his softest tones and with his suavest smile; "it is my opinion that the temptations to go astray are extraordinary. I very rarely leave undone what I ought to do, and I don't think I sigh to do what I ought not, and I am not exceptional."

"You are exceptionally well satisfied with your own success in doing right," Blanche replied, "and that is a fault to start with."

"Never mind, I mean well," Frank answered; "we all mean well, especially your mamma, Blanche."

Blanche smiled and frowned.

"I wish we all meant as well as mamma," she said, soberly; "we should not, in that case, mystify one another painfully for long!"

"Are we any of us mystifying each other painfully now, may I ask?" Mr. Bathurst interrupted. "I think that at least I am free of that charge. I am open as the day; no one could long be in doubt as to my intentions about anything."

"You are advancing your claim to the sin of conceit every moment, is he not, Mr. Talbot? Now I will name another of your faults for your penitential consideration—you are lazy, otherwise the second subject from 'Tannhauser' would be finished by this!"

"Which I deny. I am acting on the advice of the disinterested art critics who so strenuously recommended me to lie fallow for a time. By Jove! if the law of compensation works at all, what warm quarters will be awarded by-and-by to some of those fellows who have most persistently thrown cold water on aspiring art and literature!"

"We shall be better for it in the future," Lionel said, including himself, by the speech in the castigation which Frank implied that he had received at critical hands.

"You need not," Blanche said, quickly and unadvisedly.

He looked gratefully at her, but at the same time he gave her back her flattery by saying:

"If you could make me believe that, Miss Lyon, you would rob me of the aim that is best worth living for—the desire and the hope of advancing. I shall have lived my life, and lived it to miserable purpose, when I shall sit down satisfied with what I have done."

"You will be satisfied with what you have done, if two years hence, you can get ten thousand pounds for one picture, for the central figure of which your wife has sat for a model," Frank said, going round and leaning his arm on his friend's shoulder.

"That is your low view of it. Mr. Talbot will want more, and will get more than you can realize or imagine."

"You are a nice sibyl when you peer into the future for him. From my low and sordid point of view ten thousand pounds is not so despicable, and I can perfectly realize its delights."

"Mercenary-minded man! You to set up a claim for being an aesthetic artist, and not to hope for something far above gold for your friend!"

"The smiles and approbation of Miss Lyon!"

"He has them already," Blanche said coldly.

"And woman's smile forever hath
A spell to make ambition sleep,"

somebody has said. Avoid the danger, Lal!"

"No woman's smile will make his ambition sleep," Blanche answered, interlacing her fingers, and putting them up before her eyes to make a more complete screen from the sun, as they came out on the open lawn close to the house, "because any woman whose smile

he could care for would wake his ambition even more if possible; would it not be so, Mr. Talbot?"

"If she cared to do so," he replied. "But I think some mistake was made in the incantation yesterday. The spell you tried to throw over Frank has fallen on me instead."

"What portion of it?" she asked, with a glowing face.

"No woman's love shall light on thee,
No woman's heart be thine."

She trembled in every nerve as he spoke, and had she been alone with him she would have spoken some words then that would have broken the ice between them, dissolved the spell he named, and brought a kinder one into being. But Frank was round by her side again, and so she could only hope that silence would indeed be golden.

So she stood for a few moments, wishing and willing, with all the force of her soul and mind, that something would occur to take Frank away from them, if only for a minute. This opportunity passed, the passion which possessed her might pass into a phase of fear of results from which she was strangely free at this moment. It seemed to her that a crisis had come now when she might fairly give some unmistakable sign of love for Lionel, without compromising her feminine delicacy and dignity. But she could not do it with Frank standing by; and Frank looked so well inclined to stand by the whole time.

"Thou art so near, and yet so far,"

she half sang. "Do you know that song, Mr. Talbot?"

"Yes; Frank sings it," he replied; and Frank on this, began:

"Beloved eye, beloved star,
Thou art so near, and yet so far."

in a voice that Orpheus-like, might have softened the rocks and trees; but that, as evidencing the probability of his remaining longer with them, hardened Miss Lyon's heart against him yet more and more.

CHAPTER XIX.

CAUSE FOR DOUBT.

GIVEN certain conditions, and every woman, however little of a diplomatist she may be naturally, will make a subtle scheme, and carry it with a bold stroke. Blanche Lyon bore the restraint until she could bear it no longer, and then, the conditions being granted, she developed and executed her scheme in an instant.

"Frank," she exclaimed, suddenly, "will you do me a great favor?"

"Will I not? What is it?"

"Go and look for a copy of that song that is set for two voices—you will find it in the leather case on the piano—and persuade Miss Talbot to come out here and sing it with me."

Frank lounged forward a few steps toward the door. Then he evolved a better plan, as he thought, and lounged back again.

"You had better come in; it requires the accompaniment."

She seated herself on the base of a huge stone vase, full of geraniums. "I have made up my mind to sing it out here," she said, resolutely. "No, Mr. Talbot, don't you go, please. I have also made up my mind to exercise so much cousinly authority as to make Frank fetch me one little song when I ask him."

"Frank resigns himself entirely to your commands. Being a gone 'coon, I have no appeal."

"Fulfill the whole of your mission, now," Blanche cried after him. "Persuade Miss Talbot to come, or the copy for two voices will be no use."

"I fly," he shouted back, laughingly; and then he went on into the house, and Lionel and Blanche were alone at last. She was mistress of the position, and still she could not seize it.

If only he would look at her! But he did not. He stood looking away into the distance, with a quiet, earnest expression on his face, that made her fear that she was not in his thoughts—a far-off look, an absorbed look—and Frank would be sure to be back in a minute.

"Mr. Talbot!"

He looked round at her now, as she sat leaning forward, her arms folded on her lap, her head thrown up, and her eyes earnestly bent upon him. As he met her gaze she was satisfied of one thing, and that was, that however it had been a moment before, she was very much in his thoughts now.

"You have been with your brother" (she could not dash at her subject, and give him the word that should be a sign of her love, as she intended), "and you have heard?"

She paused. She meant that he had heard of Edgar's ruin; and the thought of that ruin, and all the evil train of consequences it might bring upon the Talbots, choked her. He attributed her emotion to the wrong cause; he thought she meant to offer some explanation to him, as Edgar Talbot's brother, as to her rejection of Edgar Talbot's offer. So when she paused he said:

"Yes, he told me, and I am very sorry for him. I feel for him very deeply and truly."

"And not for yourself at all?"

He colored fast and furiously, up even to his brow, at her question; it seemed to him such a strange one to come from Blanche on such a subject as he believed her to be speaking of.

"For myself, I can bear the hardest things."

"I know that; and bear them beautifully. As I said to your brother, when—when he was speaking to me the other night, women's words, and ways, and wills are so weak, when we would give our life to serve we can do nothing but sorrow."

He began to understand her now, and to feel that she was more directly referring to their loss of worldly

wealth, and to the possible blight it might be on his career.

"Sorrow and you should not be named on the same day, Miss Lyon; but your sympathy is very sweet to me."

"Sorrow and I have clasped hands often," she answered, soberly. "You do not quite realize that I have had all my life to take most earnest heed and thought for myself and others. I seem to you to be—just what I seem, in fact."

"And you can be nothing better." There was no idle flattering tone in his words. She knew that he meant them thoroughly, and her heart beat high. "You can feel that, and say it of me? Then I have not lived, and striven, and endeavored to 'be good' in vain."

"Nor would it have been in vain even if I had not felt that truth and worded it," he said, kindly. "My approbation would have been a mean guerdon to strive for."

"The best I could have." Then she rose up, and temptation never came to a man in a fairer guise than it did to Lionel Talbot then, to speak out and tell her that he loved her. But he wrestled with it for two or three reasons; among others, this lately-born one, that, while his sisters needed his aid, he must not charge himself with a wife, even if the woman he wanted was willing to be that wife. So he struggled to seem indifferent to that which almost upset his judgment, as Blanche made a step or two toward him, telling him that his approbation was the best guerdon she could have—and meaning it too; of that he felt convinced.

"Oh, gentle time, give back to me one hour which thou hast taken! Blanche often thought in after-days, when she recalled this hour, and the poor use she had been enabled to make of it. For at this juncture Frank and Beatrix came out to them, Frank hilariously caroling, as became one who was never defeated, never heart-sick, never doubtful as to the blooming issue of all his brightest hopes; and Beatrix, with the unsatisfied look on her face that is indicative of feeling aggrieved with one's self for one's weakness in granting the small requests of the loved one who abstains from making large demands. It was impossible for Beatrix to refuse any favor or concession asked of her by Frank; and she knew that it was, and was indignant with herself for its being so; and still she could not help herself, but went whithersoever, and did whatsoever he asked of her. It was stinging to her, this being looked up and required at the last, when Frank had been away for a whole sunny hour (perfectly oblivious of her) by the lake with Blanche. It came even to the true-hearted, noble-natured Trixy, to hate Blanche, as she came upon the latter "standing and charming Lionel," as Trixy worded the situation to herself, when Mr. Bathurst was not by. She did not suppose for one instant that Blanche was in an equally evil case with herself. Our own private grief is always the mightiest in the world, before which all others dwarf themselves to the meanest proportions.

"I am not very much in the mood for singing, but I came out as you sent for me," Trixy said, as she came up to them; and then Blanche, who really could afford to be generous and tolerant toward Trixy, put her hands kindly on the girl's shoulders, and said, almost in a whisper:

"Please don't think me heartless and thoughtless, dear, but your brother will not bear this bad blow the better for seeing you depressed by it; forgive me if I seem to think less sorrowfully of it than I have thought—will you, will you?"

She was so strangely winning as she spoke in her earnest, pleading tones, with all the force of her earnest, winning beauty, that Trixy felt much happier.

"I think I could forgive you almost anything," she said, affectionately, and Blanche laughed and replied:

"In that one little speech you made a couple of provisos; however, forgive me for having sent for you now, and let me sing second to you."

They sang the song "gloriously," as Frank declared, and again he found himself very strongly directed toward Miss Talbot. At any rate there was time enough, he told himself, to make resolutions and carry them out when the glorious summer, during which one should only feel and exist, was over. So the sybarite snatched the hour, and pleased himself according to his wont in being very pleasant to them both. And Blanche's heart ached horribly because she saw that Lionel fancied she overrated her gay cousin's devotion.

By-and-by Mrs. Lyon came home from her tour of inspection over the cottage that was to let in the village. "It was the very thing she should like for herself," she said, "and she was almost sorry that anybody else should be going to live there; the garden was the very style of garden that was most pleasing to her, and the green-house would be lovely when repaired; as to the house, well, she never had liked London houses, and she should like them now less than ever; give her a place in the country where you were not overlooked; that was all she asked."

"I think I should like it, too," Beatrix said, demurely.

"Get your brother to take it for your autumn quarters, Miss Talbot," Frank exclaimed. He had yet to learn that some such change of residence would be a matter of necessity, not choice, with the Talbots.

"Do you know," Blanche whispered to Beatrix, "that it will be just as well to manage all this without telling the truth to mamma? I know everything, Trixy, dear, and I thought of sending mamma to look at that house for an imaginary friend; the concealment is harmless enough. Do you agree to letting her think that her wishes weigh in the matter?"

"If that plan is decided upon," Trixy said, dubiously; and as the other three were all speaking animatedly at once on the superior advantages of the country over the town, the conversation between the two girls was unheard.

"Why should it not be decided upon?" Blanche questioned, eagerly. "If you like it, why should you

not stay here where you can have human companionship when you feel inclined? Mr. Talbot wishes my mother to live with you still; it would be very dull for you in a strange country place with her alone; here you will have my cousin and your brother Lionel often."

"And you always?" Trixy tried to say it joyfully.

"No, indeed; me very rarely; I shall go out in the world again."

Trixys eyes questioned "Why?"

"Oh, it's not only men who must work in these nineteenth century days," Blanche said, smiling; "I rather like the necessity, too. I believe I have more of the bee than the butterfly in me."

"Then I shall lose you," Trixy said.

Blanche looked grave.

"Will you promise never to lose your liking for me?

"I am very greedy of that."

"There is nothing that could happen that could make me not like you, I think," Beatrix replied, and she did not quite mean what she said.

"There can nothing happen to give you cause for liking me less," Blanche answered, heartily; and she did mean what she said, and did wish to give Beatrix some comforting assurance respecting Frank at the same time. Then they all got themselves together again, and talked about the cottage in the village, which, to use Mrs. Lyon's words, "was the very place she wished to live and die in." And presently Edgar came out to join them, and it was proposed and carried by universal consent that they should all drive down after luncheon and judge of the merits of the dwelling for themselves.

"I have heard from Marian to-day," Edgar Talbot said, when luncheon was nearly over. "She pretends to be in great distress about her husband's niece; there was some sort of understanding or engagement between the girl and some young fellow in the country, and, as usual, Mrs. Sutton has marred the harmony."

"What has she done?" they all asked, eagerly.

The tale of how the course of true love has been made to run roughly always meets with an attentive audience.

"Oh, she speaks as the injured one—a sure sign with Marian that she has been very much to blame. Even Mark is angry, and that is a state of things that does not at all agree with Mrs. Sutton."

"Your sister is one of the most fascinating women I ever met," Frank Bathurst said, good-naturedly.

"So I have heard," Edgar replied. "Well, her latest fascinations have been exercised in making a good, honest, foolish young fellow unhappy, and in proving to him that 'every woman is a rake at heart'; we have every reason to be proud of our sister's genius for making people miserable."

He spoke very bitterly, for Marian's letter had been very bitter to him. She had reviled him for that which he could not help—his own ruin, namely—and she had upbraided him for having wasted her husband's and husband's sister's money. After a page or two of this matter, she had gone on to tell him how a misunderstanding had arisen between her niece Ellen and the young man to whom Ellen was engaged, and she had appended to this statement a sentence which had grated more harshly than all her revilings upon her brother's feelings.

"He came up to town a day or two ago to reproach me, I believe; but unwittingly I gave a sop to Cerberus, and now he would undergo the tortures of a row with his lady-love every week, provided the reconciliation-scene may take place under my auspices; he is really a perfect Apollo, and only wants a polishing to make him the most perfect cavalier in the row."

This was the paragraph in her letter that most sorely wounded her brother; these were the sentiments that made him say bitterly that they had every reason to be proud of Marian. It seemed good to Lionel to change the topic, which he did by asking:

"How shall we divide ourselves to go down to the village?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE STRONGER WILL!

BLANCHE LYON suffered the others to advance propositions respecting the manner and the means to be employed in getting down to the village to look at the cottage that was to let. It was not at all in her way to seek to add confusion to chaos by opposing what was not even half established, and pointing out the weakness that would immediately assert itself.

"The distance is nothing—let us walk. I have walked it in comfort once already to-day," Mrs. Lyon said, leaning back in her chair, after a comfortable luncheon, and fanning herself in a way that was expressive of fatigue.

"Let us have the wagonette and all go together," Frank Bathurst proposed. He felt that there would be a difficulty about getting to be alone with Blanche, and he did not care about being alone with any one else just then.

"I don't see that there is any necessity for your all putting yourselves out of the way to go down," Edgar Talbot said: "Trixys and Miss Lyon will perhaps walk down with me, and you could wait here for us to come back and fall in with your plans, whatever they are, for the afternoon."

"I should like to go down again and point out one of two little things," Mrs. Lyon said, in the tone of one who felt that whatever she did the others would not sufficiently appreciate her excellence in doing it—"I should like to go down again and point out one or two little things that are not as I should like them to be in the house." She looked from one to the other appealingly as she spoke, as if she rather expected them to deny her even this small boon of tiring herself, for no good end, more completely than she was already.

"Walking is out of the question for you, mamma," Blanche said, firmly.

"Then my wagonette plan is the best," Mr. Bathurst said, with a sort of "that settles it" smile.

"You drive, I suppose?" Blanche said, persuasively, looking at him as he pushed his chair back and got up.

"Yes. I will drive."

"And Miss Talbot will have the place of honor by your side, and—you are letting me arrange it all—in-tending to coincide with my arrangement, are you not?"

"Unquestionably," he replied.

"And mamma and Mr. Talbot will sit just behind you. I shall ride: you will lend me the mare you offered to give me?"

Her accents were very seductive in their subtle sweetness as she addressed him; but for all that subtle sweetness they grated on his ears. She had portioned out the places of all save Lionel Talbot; and she designed to ride, and Lionel Talbot would be free to go with her.

"Of course I let you arrange it all. I must propose one alteration, however, which is far from being an amendment," he said, gallantly; "the mare gave my wrist an awkward jerk this morning. I doubt whether I could hold those young horses together or not. Lal had better drive them, and I will ride with you."

He came nearer to her as he spoke, his fair face flushed, and his blue eyes dancing with the consciousness that they were all perfectly alive to the root of his desire for this change. His infatuation for Blanche amused himself so much that he had not the smallest objection to its amusing other people in a lesser degree. He was as wilful as a woman about carrying his own point, but Blanche opposed him with a still deeper wilfulness.

"Let me look at your wrist," she said, and then when he came close and extended his hand she laid her slender white fingers firmly on the part which he had declared had been given an awkward jerk. "I will strengthen it for you," she said, in a low voice, binding her handkerchief tightly round it as she spoke: "please do not frustrate my politics, whatever they may be; drive as you promised!"

She spoke very hurriedly in fear of being overheard by the others, who, as is usual in most cases, misunderstood her manner and motives, and believed her to be flirting at him, her cousin host, with vigor and determination. But though she spoke hurriedly she spoke forcibly, and Frank felt that it behooved him to attend to her.

"Come nearer to the light, that you may see to tie my bandage becomingly," he said, laughing, drawing her after him to the window. "That's well! Now, Blanche," he muttered, "what is it? You mean going alone?"

"I do not mean going with you at any rate. Behave yourself, Frank; hands that are appendages to sprained wrists ought not to have the power of pressing so painfully; let my hand go, sir, and promise me you drive."

"I promise," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "anything you like; I will order the horses."

As he left the room there was a general movement made, a sort of feint among the party of going to get ready, and it chanced that Lionel Talbot and Blanche were brought near together.

"The blunder of narrow doorways," Blanche laughed, as Lionel stepped back for her to pass him, and she stepped back courteously at the same moment; steps which caused their detention in the room alone after the others had left it. "Am I to ride alone, Mr. Talbot?" she said, suddenly.

"You seem to prefer the groom's escort to Frank's," he replied.

"I did nothing of the kind, and the groom has never been mentioned. Will you ride with me? That is a plain and straightforward way of putting it."

"I had better not, precious as the office of taking charge of you, if only for a short time, would be to me—I had better not."

"Why?" she said. And then she linked her fingers together, and let her hands fall down in front of her. She was holding her head up proudly, but her eyes were downcast, hidden by their lashes. "Why?" she repeated, as he looked at her most lovingly, but spoke no word.

"Why?" he echoed. "Because—will you have it—my reason?"

"Yes, I will have it—I will hear it. You shall tell me so plainly that there can be no mistake about it," she said, excitedly.

"I had better not take charge of you, because the office is too precious to be held with impunity to the holder for only a short time. Forgive me, Miss Lyon, you almost forced the truth from me."

Even as he asked for her forgiveness in broken, subdued tones she came nearer to him, with a soft, loving triumph that was inexpressibly thrilling to him, in her face and bearing.

"I have forced the truth from you for no low, vain end," she said; and her hands were extended to him—were taken—were pressed to his heart, before Lionel Talbot remembered that he was acting a very imprudent part,

"Because I love you so," he said, passionately—"because I love you so, it would be better that I should never be with you again, unless I should be with you forever."

"And is there anything to prevent that being the case?" she whispered. And then—she was, for all the bright bravery of her mind and manner, a woman endowed with that infinitely caressing way that cannot be withstood—then she lowered her head a little, and sighingly let it find a resting place on his shoulder.

"You feared your fate too much, Lionel," she said.

"It was too bright a one for me to dare to hope to touch it. Blanche! be wise in time, my darling; think of what you are relinquishing before you suffer me to let my whole heart go out to you in so full a way that I may never get it back and live. I have so little to

offer you beside that heart, sweet child—Frank has so much."

"Which will be surrendered to Trixy before long. Perhaps you will submit to my loss of Haldon with a better grace if it is Trixy's gain?" She asked this in a light tone; but she added soberly enough an instant after: "Never regret your want of anything for my sake, Lionel; if poor Edgar had succeeded, as he believed and hoped he should succeed in his ventures, it would have come to this between you and me, and I should have basked idly in the sun of that success, and been very happy. As it is—well, I have it in me to fight for fortune with you against the world."

She looked so joyously confident, so radiantly satisfied with the existing state of things, so bewitchingly hopeful about the future, that Lionel felt that

Poor wisdom's chance
Against a glance"

was weaker than ever. However much more brilliant her fate would have been if she had given her heart to his friend instead of to himself, the intoxicating truth that her heart was entirely his now, came to him unalloyed by a shadow of doubt. Still he strove to render his grasp upon her looser, less that of "lord and lover" for a moment, as he said:

"Take care, Blanche! I can give you up now, and never blame you in word or thought for having got me to tell you that it will be death to me to do so; but five minutes of this, and no earthly power shall make me give you up—you hear me?"

"And mark you too," she said, holding her head far back, and shaking it winningly, with an air of satisfied acquiescence in her decision that was strangely soothing to him. "You shall have the five minutes; as for the opportunity of defying earthly powers, I am afraid your tenacity will not be put to the test, unless mamma intervenes." And then they both laughed.

"Mamma's intervention may possibly hasten the union of the principal powers," he said.

"Mamma is safe to be, funny about it," Blanche said, gravely, "it goes without saying that she will be that; she will view the matter from the melancholy point of view, if not from the lachrymose, for a while, but it will all come right by-and-by."

"Yes, of course it will, if we make our own arrangements and abide by them, without suffering let or hindrance from others."

"I hear them coming down stairs," Blanche exclaimed, starting and blushing; "do let me go and put my habit on—and ride with me, will you?"

"Will I not?" he answered, very fondly, as she got herself away through the doorway which she had declared just now "to be a blunder."

"We don't need a groom; I am going to ride with Miss Lyon," Lionel said to Frank Bathurst when Blanche came down and joined them just outside the hall-door, where the wagonette and a couple of saddle-horses were waiting. Lionel said it with that assumption of intense indifference which generally first betrays to others the fact of a man having utterly surrendered to the one of whom he does not speak as he feels.

"Are you so? very well," Frank said, rather coldly; and then he turned away without offering to help Blanche on to her horse. The men were friends, in the best sense of the word; but it is a hard thing for both when friends love the same woman.

"Earthly power number one is unpropitious," Blanche said, in a low tone, as Lionel stooped for her to put her foot in his hand; "believe me, though, Lionel, I would not speak of it if I were not sure that with him it is a passing cloud. Frank will not be angry with us long."

"I hope not. How sweet you look in your riding-gear!" Lionel replied. Friendship stands such a poor chance of being ably considered when love puts in his claim.

It was hard upon Mr. Bathurst; it was very hard upon Mr. Bathurst to have to see that pair go off together, and to be doomed himself to play the part of charioteer to Mrs. Lyon, Edgar, and Beatrix; for it is a fact that a woman in love, and at the same time sure that the one she loves loves somebody else, is very much at a disadvantage. The whole of that little scene of starting got stamped in vividly upon poor Trixy's mind. Blanche's absolute power over both the men who loved her and the man she loved were painful sights to the girl who had no apparent power over anyone just at the time. Miss Lyon's plan of making one man radiantly happy by riding with him, and another man dolefully dull by not driving with him, was a gift that not all Trixy's Christian charity could compel her to think good. The brother would have been surrendered with a good grace to the brilliant rival, but human nature must cease to be itself before a lover can be given up graciously.

Their way lay through such bowery lanes; between such high-banked, rich, garden-like hedges! It was the time of roses, and consequently, the time for most of our fairest wild flowers to bloom. The beauty of the uncultivated sloping parterres through which they passed made matter for talk for them for a time; but presently, when the fast trot of the cobs had carried the wagonette so far ahead of them that it was safe to speak, and even to look, a slight pressure on the rear rein brought Lionel's horse closer to Blanche's, and he said:

"Concealment is always bad; if we fairly understand each other, darling, it seems to me to be only fair to the others that they should understand us, too."

"Hurried disclosures are as bad as concealment," she said. "We do fairly understand each other, Lionel; of course we do; but why make talk about that understanding before it is needful? Circumstance is a mighty monarch; about ourselves we, and we only, have to consult him; meanwhile we had better not consult other people, I think."

As she spoke she lifted up her hand to switch the air with her whip. Lionel caught the hand and held it. "I could have gone on suffering silence to reign as to my feelings about you if you had not let me speak to you as I have spoken this morning; but now that course is closed to me. I cannot look upon you as my future wife in secret. My love has gone out to you as I never thought it could to any woman. You have accepted the love; you must submit to the show of it."

"Submit! As far as I am concerned, I accept all show of it with pride and gladness," she said, softly; "but for you, Lionel, avowed engagements fitter a man who is fighting with the world. People will not overlook the fact of success being essential to him because he is going to be married, and so, often the hand that is playing honestly and lovingly for fortune's favors is rendered unsteady or weak by the too keen observation bent upon it. Play freely, dearest, for a time, at least."

"Freely, but not secretly," he said.

"You have it in you to be very rash."

"I have when I am very fond. Rash, do you say? No, Blanche; in this case the rashness would be in concealment. If I shrank from proclaiming that you had promised to be my own, you would be the first to condemn my weakness in thus shrinking; and yet women are so consistently inconsistent that you urge me to do it."

"For our mutual good, I am sure."

"How would it be for our mutual good that we should be held in check—cut off from the confidence that should cheer us?"

"My cowardice is not for myself," she answered, blushing brightly. "I only feel that for you it might be better not to be supposed to have the obligation laid upon you of having to make money enough to support a wife for a time; but if you will risk the drawbacks, Lionel!"

"You will agree to their all knowing that you are going to be my wife," he interrupted: "and the sooner they know it, and the sooner it is, the better. Be sure of one thing—I am not going to let you out into the world again without me."

She looked up at him gratefully, proudly, fondly. "Oh, Lal, it was only for your sake I counselled concealment for a time; for my own I thank you for your decision, and accept it, as I will every one you make henceforth without appeal."

As she finished her sentence they turned into the one little crooked street of the village in which the cottage that was to let was situated, and fell under the observation of the party in the wagonette, which was pulled up to wait for them.

"I wish Blanche would not lag behind in that way," Mrs. Lyon said, rather peevishly. It seemed to the good old lady a wicked waste of a golden opportunity that her daughter should linger behind with a comparatively poor artist, when a rich land-owner was ahead. Before anyone could reply to her the pair on horseback came up at a sharp trot, and something in Blanche's manner told Frank Bathurst that the "game was gone."

Need it be said that as soon as this conviction smote him he accepted the situation with the blithe amiability that characterized him, and became on the spot their warmest ally. From the bottom of his bright, warm, wide heart he had wished for Miss Lyon for his wife: but since he could not have her through some distortion of her own judgment, he was admirably well contented that his friend should be successful. At any rate she would not drop out of his orbit, and be lost to his beauty-loving sight. It would still be within his power to hear her talk, to see her move about with that subtle seductiveness of movement which no other woman possessed. The link of friendship should never be broken between the two families, and Blanche would still be free to charm him, as only so clever, fascinating, and beautiful a woman could charm him. He watched her as Lionel helped her from her horse, and when she reached the ground he managed to make her eyes meet his. For a moment or two they looked unflinchingly, and when each slowly turned away from the other's gaze the understanding between them was as honorable and complete as if it had been legally drawn up and ratified. They were to be friends, free and unfettered in manner and in mind, without a back thought or regret about anything between them.

"One moment," he muttered, as they were passing into the cottage garden in the rear of the rest, and he put his hand upon hers as she spoke, "one moment. My wrist is strong enough now, you see; it does not tremble as I tell you I see what has happened, and rejoice in it, dear Blanche, for my old friends. God bless you both! You will be very happy."

"And so will you, Frank?" she half asserted, half interrogated.

"Yes," he said, gayly; "I don't think it is in me to be a despairing swain."

"If you did despair I should say you were blind and void of all taste," she answered, hurriedly, as the others looked back at them from the already opened door, and they had to hasten their steps to rejoin them.

It was a charming cottage. The "two or three little drawbacks" which Mrs. Lyon had anxiously volunteered to point out were no drawbacks at all in the eyes of the young people. When looked upon in cold blood it must be acknowledged that it was an irregular and defective abode; for the drawing and dining rooms had been added to the original structure, and the original structure had the air of disapproving of the additions and of holding itself aloof from them as much as possible. The ceilings had given way in one or two of the rooms, and the kitchen range was a monstrous rusty enigma to Mrs. Lyon; but despite these trifles the cottage was charming, for it was prettily papered, and it had French windows, and its walls were festooned by roses, and its garden sloped away in privacy to the woods.

"It's a perfect little paradise," Beatrix said aloud; and she thought how sweet it would be to share such a paradise with Frank Bathurst.

"It is just the house for a pair of artistic-minded young married people," Frank himself said, gravely.

"Well, Mrs. Lyon, what is your verdict?" Edgar Talbot asked.

"I only wish it was going to be my home," that lady answered, with the bright admiration that came from her feeling over-confident about it's never being her home.

"Then I may as well tell you at once what I should shortly have been compelled to tell you in any case. I am going to break up my London establishment—why I need hardly tell you—and I should be glad if you will continue to afford my sister the same countenance and protection here which you consented to give her in London. May I hope that it will be so, Mrs. Lyon?"

"Live here!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; live here for a time at least."

"Mamma, you can have no better plan to propose," Blanche said, reproachfully; and then Mrs. Lyon shook her head dolorously, and said:

"Oh no; of course not!" adding suddenly, "Would it not be far better to go into nice, quiet, convenient lodgings in London, where every comfort would be supplied to us, than to live here? Consider the butcher."

"I really must confess to considering my own and my sister's convenience before the butcher," Edgar said, laughing.

"I mean, think of the distance we are from him; not but what I shall be very happy to stay here, if you all wish me to do it; but how are we to manage? there is no furniture!" and Mrs. Lyon, as she spoke, looked from one to the other as if she would ask their pardon for mildly appealing against that want of consideration of them which made them expect her to joyously acquiesce in the prospect of living in an empty house.

"The furniture shall be sent down from Victoria Street if you will agree to live here for at least a year after it is furnished," Mr. Talbot replied.

"Then it will not fit," Mrs. Lyon said, like a woman.

"Never mind, it's fitting the house," Edgar replied like a man, "we will settle it when it comes."

"What am I to do about the range?" Mrs. Lyon said, dejectedly. "I am sure I shall be delighted to remain with Miss Talbot here, or anywhere else, for a year; but I could wish that range altered, or I shall never have a moment's peace; 'Fit for a young married couple with artistic minds'!—well, it may be fit for such; but I know what the cooking will be if that range isn't looked to."

"Let us take the house and ask Trixy to stay with us," Lionel whispered; "and let your mother go back to the delightful London lodgings, where she can be free from the burden of that range." But Miss Lyon turned a deaf ear to that suggestion. She was not made of the materials to marry in haste, with the possibility before her that circumstances might cause the man she married to repent at leisure. Accordingly, she only shook her head in reply to him, and then said:

"The greater good of the greater number is the point to be considered by all of us. Mamma, this will be the best place for you to live in with Trixy."

"Where shall we all find room?" Mrs. Lyon said, querulously.

"I may not be at home for long," Blanche replied.

"I will have no more governessing," Mrs. Lyon said, emphatically. "You shall not go out in that way again."

Blanche laughed and shook her head.

"I promise you I will not attempt to do it," she said. "I am more ambitious in these days; you shall know in what way if I succeed."

"And you will tell me even if you fail, will you, my own Blanche?" Lionel whispered, as they went out together, and he prepared to put her on her horse. But Blanche in reply to this only bent her brow with that look of sudden steadfastness which had a habit of coming over her face, as she replied:

"I won't promise that, Lionel; failures are not nice things to talk about."

"Why venture anything on your own account? why not trust yourself wholly and solely to me? there is a great deal wanting in your love while you refuse to do this."

She was stung to quick speech by his supposition. "You know—you must know that I would brave anything, relinquish anything, do anything, for the sake of being your wife," she said; "but I won't consent to fetter you; to impoverish and lessen you in any way would be frightful to me. Lionel, I would rather crush my love than do it. I will crush my love, if it comes to that: do you believe me?"

"No," he said, as he slung himself upon his horse.

"No, Lionel."

"I do not believe that my own love for you is so weak as to be incapable of overcoming such scruples. Oh, child! you are mine now to have and to hold against the world; even against yourself. Don't let me hear any more about your 'fettering,' or 'impoverishing,' or 'lessening' me. When you are my wife I will teach you that your being that is ample compensation for everything else."

She began conning the lesson he was willing to teach her, with such a pleased, happy look on her face as she turned it toward him.

"Oh, Lionel! after all my wise, prudent speeches, what will you think of me, when I tell you that I love you desperately, darling, desperately?"

"Think! that I am surer of you than I was before you gave yourself out to speak the truth," he said, fondly; "there must be no going back from this, Blanche; we are bound to play for fortune's favors; to fight the battle of life together."

CHAPTER XXI.

JOHN WILMOT.

WHEN John Wilmot had started with Ellen Bowden on the occasion of the latter's leaving for London he had bemoaned himself bitterly and openly, as became a loving, frank boy, and Ellen had shown superior self-command, and had developed that almost cruelly comforting manner which the one who is soundest at heart alone can show. He had been tearful, jealous, hopeless about her and her stability, and she had sought to assuage these various passions in her own sensible, affectionate, truthful way, and had failed while she was still present with him. But when they were wide apart, and John Wilmot was free from the painful excitement of hearing what might befall Ellen in London perpetually discussed, he began to reassert his own masculine superiority to absence, distance, and change—to console himself with the reflection that his own true instincts would have saved him from the snares of a false woman for his first true love, and to be generally sanguine.

So he continued for the first few weeks of Ellen's stay with her aunt, Mrs. Sutton; so he continued long after Ellen's letters became mere circulars apologizing for not having "written before," and for "not writing more now" (for the effusions whose frequent exit from her house Marian sagaciously ignored contained little more than these sentences); so he continued until further patient continuance would have been a weakness; and then he took thought as to the path it would be well for him to pursue, and finally decided on going up to see her.

He did not much care whether or not he would be welcome to the presiding powers of the house in which she was dwelling. He loved Ellen Bowden, and it was Ellen Bowden alone whom he had to consider. Such love as his for the girl he had known all her life her uncle and aunt would be powerless to compensate her for, if they caused her to lose it. So he went up with the determination fixed firmly in his mind that she should not lose it if fond efforts of his could teach her how to keep it still.

He was a good-looking young fellow, with the good looks of height and health, of honor and honesty; dark, clear-complexioned, open-eyed, with short, curly brown hair, and the upright bearing and slinging step of one who is no stranger to the carrying of a gun and the breaking in of a thorough-bred colt. He had received greater educational advantages than the sons of yeomen usually receive, for he had been a private pupil in the house of the vicar of his father's parish, and the vicar was a gentleman and a scholar; and he was a young man gifted with the grace of making the most of these advantages, for he had kept his mind from rusting by going through a course of reading of the English classics, slowly but regularly, since he had come from the vicar's supervision. Accordingly he had shone as a star of some magnitude in Ellen Bowden's little world. His selection of her had been deemed an honor; for report said that the vicar's daughter would have smiled upon him if he had sought her smiles. Altogether, Ellen Bowden was regarded by herself and others as a very fortunate girl, when it became generally known that she was going to marry young John Wilmot.

He had never liked the plan of her going up to London to be polished, as her mother called it. "She was quite polished enough for a farmer's wife," he said, "and he never wanted her to seem or to be thought more than a farmer's wife." They were young and happy, and they loved each other dearly, and there was nothing to stop their wedding immediately and being free to show how happy and loving they were—nothing to stop it, save this freak of Mrs. Bowden's that Ellen should go up to London to see life and be polished by intercourse with Martin's lady wife, Mrs. Sutton.

He kept up a hopeful heart about this girl with whom he looked forward to passing his life, until her letters, from being brief and cold, ceased altogether. That was her aunt's influence, he told himself, her lady aunt, who probably did not want further connection with rough country people, and who perhaps deemed Ellen pretty enough to command a better match in town. However, it was certainly not her aunt's mission in life to step between him and his wife, for that Ellen would have been by this time had she not gone up to be polished. Accordingly he resolved to go up and see how things were going—resolved to go up and battle for his rights against the subtle influence which was weaning his love from him.

He had many dark and angry thoughts about Mrs. Sutton in his mind as he traveled up. He pictured her to himself as a high-nosed, haughty-mannered, handsome, heartless woman, who would try to make him uncomfortable by being cold and distant to him. If she was this, he told himself he would put it plainly to Ellen that she would be wanting in some of the fine respect and consideration a woman should have for her future husband if she did not at once side with him and leave her aunt. It would be their lives—Ellen's and his—that would be welded together; no temporary alliance with her aunt ought to be maintained by the girl at the cost of a rift in their future permanent one.

He reached Mrs. Sutton's house about six o'clock in the evening, and before his appeal at the door was answered the trampling of horses made him look round to see Ellen, accompanied by a lady and gentleman, ride up to the steps. The lady was young, fair, bewitchingly pretty, and gentle looking. He never thought for an instant that she could be the terrible aunt whom he had come up to befriend in her own den. Indeed he did not think of anything, it must be acknowledged, for a minute or two, as Ellen stooped forward and held out her hand to him as he started forward to meet her, and exclaimed:

"Oh! John, how you frightened me! Aunt Marian, let me introduce Mr. John Wilmot."

"Quite a young Apollo," was Mrs. Sutton's mental remark as she bowed gracefully and languidly to the

young man whom she feared might interfere with several of her present plans. Then she dismounted with the aid of her cavalier, and determined to "disarm Orson by courtesy."

"Let me hope that you will dine with us at seven, and go with Elly and me to a concert afterward," she said, sweetly. "You must have a great deal of home news to give your old friend, and I cannot let her stay to hear it now, for we must go and dress; but dine with us at seven."

John Wilmot accepted the invitation with a greater amount of embarrassment than he had ever before believed it possible he could feel in the presence of any woman, even if she were a queen. He was not quite sure of what it behooved him to do. Should he go in at once—go into the palace of this fairy queen? or should he retire to the depths of his hotel and dress himself in the most fitting array he possessed for the banquet?

"I will come—I shall be very happy," he stammered, and then he looked round to see whether or not Ellen was very happy in his acceptance of the invitation. But Ellen was springing from her horse at the moment, and he could not catch her eye.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. SUTTON'S LITTLE DINNER.

JOHN WILMOT had an extraordinarily good physique. He was one of those men with small heads, set well on between square shoulders, who, by reason of their bodily strength, rarely look mentally weak. For instance, on this occasion, though he had gone through several phases of nervousness between the moment of receiving Mrs. Sutton's invitation and the moment of his accepting it, there was no trace of the torture upon him when at length he walked into Marian's drawing-room. That lady herself, turning round to watch his approach and welcome him, acknowledged that the young yeoman might almost be a gentleman.

His nervousness had been a vague feeling, created by vague causes. Unlike a woman under similar circumstances, he had not sought to give form and substance to the experience that was about to come to him. He had only felt strongly convinced that he should that evening find himself in a society, and amidst surroundings, of the usages of which he was utterly ignorant. He had only feared that this ignorance might manifest itself and lower him in the eyes of Ellen.

But now, when he came into the room, he exercised so much constraint over himself as to seem, even to the keen blue eyes of Marian Sutton, to be very much at ease. The two ladies, the aunt and niece, felt the fact with a throb of surprise—the latter with a throb of pleasure that he bore himself as best became him; that the happy medium manner existed in a quarter where they could not reasonably have looked for it.

"It is like old days to see you again, John," Ellen said, as John Wilmot came over to the side of the chair in which she was lounging and fanning herself.

"Yes, it must seem as though you had only been separated for a day or two," Mrs. Sutton put in; "it always does seem so, I notice, when intimate friends meet, unless either has altered very much."

"Then one of us must have altered very much," John Wilmot answered, decidedly; "seeing her in this way neither reminds me of old days, nor makes me think the old days anything but long past."

"He shall mark the difference more before I have done with him," Marian thought; she said aloud:

"What nonsense we talk about 'old times,' to be sure; when, if the truth were told, there is not one in a thousand who would wish to live them over again. I would not for one; would you, Elly?"

"The present is so pleasant to me that I can't wish for any change, Aunt Marian," Ellen said, deprecatingly; and then John Wilmot could not help feeling that the change from this room, with its delicately-papered walls, where glittering mirrors reproduced the profusely scattered beauties of art which Marian had delighted in collecting, to the best parlor of the house he sighed to make Ellen mistress of, would be great, indeed.

His eyes mirrored his thoughts, as he let them fall questioningly, regretfully, lovingly, on the girl who had promised to marry him. She was changed; she was changed; she was very much changed. His eyes told him that she was improved; but his heart rebelled against the improvement. It was not of an order to conduce to the comfort of the homely-appointed farmhouse where her lines would be cast if she were faithful to him and to herself.

The change was too subtle for the blunt, honest mind of the young man to analyze it. It was expressed in everything; in posture, in dress, in tone; and still, when he tried, he could not define it himself. He had seen her in silks and muslins often of old; this robe that she wore now was only silk, and yet it seemed a far more exalted material than it belonged to women of his order to wear. As Ellen went on speaking to him, still leaning back lazily, with a self-possession that was new to him in her, still slowly waving the big black Spanish fan to and fro, he felt that she would be incongruous in his best parlor.

"My husband is away from home, Mr. Wilmot," Mrs. Sutton said, presently, "but we have not victimized you to the extent of making you our sole escort. Arthur Eldale is coming to; isn't it gorgeous of him?"

"Why?" John Wilmot asked.

"Oh, custom commands that gratitude be felt and shown when Arthur Eldale sacrifices himself at a concert and a quiet dinner to precede it," the lady replied, laughing.

Now a dinner at seven o'clock, and a concert to follow, represented much dissipation to John Wilmot's mind. It had been his proud and happy fate to attend three or four fifth-rate musical meetings in the market

town where Ellen used to live; and these had been gala days to him. He had worn a flower in his coat on one occasion he remembered, and gloves that were too tight and that hurt him in the wrist; but he had been happy in hearing "Come into the garden, Maud," sung by some one whom the local papers the next day declared to be a formidable rival of Sims Reeves. He could not understand why gratitude should be felt and evinced to Mr. Arthur Eldale for sharing such pleasure in such company. But before he could be instructed as to the reason, Ellen said :

"He will make dinner late, I know, in order to get out of the first part."

"I shall be very glad if he does," Mrs. Sutton yawned; the trio for the piano, violin and violoncello will be sweeter to me unheard."

"There's a fantasia, too, in the first part that will be an awful bore," Ellen said; "on airs from 'Trovatore,' I think."

"Why do you go if it's such an awful bore, Ellen?" John Wilmot asked; "you used to think enough of a concert if it was good."

"I never heard a decent one till I came to town," she said contemptuously. "Oh, Aunt Marian! you can't realize how our ears used to be tortured by people who would sing when they had neither voice, nor method, nor talent, nor anything else; ours is such an overlooked corner of the world that it has cut out of the route of the stars."

Mrs. Sutton smiled languidly. "Poor child! I am so sorry that we can't do anything you like better tonight; Eldale has made us discontented by talking of that new piece at the Adelphi."

"I suppose you have taken your tickets for this, and so you must go?" John Wilmot said, innocently.

Mrs. Sutton smiled again. "Unfortunately our tickets are given to us by the giver of the concert," she said. "A young lady, a friend of mine, makes her *début* to-night as a pianist; she is sure to be a great success, and I am much interested in her; that is our reason for going."

"Oh! and you know her?" John Wilmot said, with rather clumsy surprise. Just then Mr. Eldale was announced, and the four went in to dinner.

Then John Wilmot's surprise increased. He had expected to see a handsome room and a good table; but Mrs. Sutton knew what she was about, and was resolved to make both him and Ellen mark well the difference that existed between them now. It was not a noble-minded thing to do; but Marian had not a noble mind, and so she did it.

The dining room was brilliantly lighted, and the scent of mignonette filled the room. The party was so small to-day that the lady of the house had ordained that the repast should be served on a small oval table near to the window—a glittering oasis in a desert of Turkey carpet. Mr. Wilmot had dined at audit dinners, and at other great agricultural feasts, but he was, for all these experiences, a little thrown off his balance by the sight of the means by which his hunger was to be appeased to-night. He felt himself—this son of the soil—to be large and common, as he sat down before the snowy damask, and wondered if he was to drink out of each one of the many-shaped and colored wine-glasses, that shone, and glanced, and gleamed at his right hand, and the vase of roses in the centre, and the graceful specimen glass, with a single rare flower in it standing by the forks, they made him feel how far more fittingly Ellen was situated among them, than she would be in a room whose floral adornments consisted of asparagus in the fire-place, and a conglomeration of many-colored flowers in what his mother called the bow-pot on the mantelpiece.

Mr. Arthur Eldale, also, was not a tranquilizing element to John in this party of four. He was a man of about thirty-five or forty, dark, distinguished-looking, and gifted with a glibness of utterance, a facility of articulation, that made John Wilmot feel as if his words would all tumble out of his mouth the wrong way. And Mr. Eldale talked of so many things, and had been to so many places, and was apparently "up" in all the sports that the young farmer had hitherto thought were specialties of country born and bred men.

The dinner went by like a dream to the young man, who had never dined in such a way before. Really like a dream; for only in a dream could he conceive the possibility of savory dishes being wafted before him, and white-clothed hands filling many-colored glasses with sparkling liquids that made the voices of the others sound far away. Only in a dream could Ellen turn from him impatient to listen to a stranger! Only in a dream could it come to him to feel that he was unworthy in some way, though he had never in all his unspotted young life been guilty of one unworthy or lowering act.

It was over at last, that sparkling feast, whereat poor John Wilmot had been at such a disadvantage. It was over; and the two ladies were gone up-stairs to get their cloaks, and gloves, and fans, and the two men were left alone. And then John Wilmot did indeed feel that all his good angels had deserted him, and that he was not feeling as a man should feel before man in the presence of this stranger, who had the gift of being inoffensive offensively.

Just at first Mr. Eldale kept silence; and that sunk John Wilmot in his own estimation. Then Mr. Eldale spoke; and that sunk John still more, for he was not clear as to what it behooved him to answer. "I suppose you know your fate, eh?" the gentleman observed, coolly; and poor John Wilmot wondered whether Mr. Eldale meant his (John's) fate with Ellen, and what it would be well for him to say. At last he said:

"I am not sure that I do know it."

"You don't mean that they have trapped you in here without telling you what they are going to do with you, do you?"

Arthur Eldale laughed, turning round and carelessly

leaning his arm over the back of his chair. "You're to be taken to hear a trio in C minor."

"What is that?" John Wilmot interrogated.

"The very devil when you have to listen to it when you would rather be somewhere else," the other replied. Then he added, quickly, "That will not be the case with us to-night, though. Ah! 'I said she was fairer than Dian,'" he quoted, rising up and going to meet her with an air of homage as Mrs. Sutton, in diaphanous drapery, floated into the room, followed by Ellen.

Once more, while they were waiting for the carriage to be announced, John Wilmot felt strangely oppressed by the mystery of the difference that had come between him and Ellen. She looked kindly at him, and she spoke kindly to him, but she did these things without that sympathetically kindred air which had formerly existed between them. Ellen, playing with a fan and gloves, and a scent-bottle and a pair of lorgnettes, was an utterly different Ellen to the Ellen of old, who would probably have dropped half of them in country-girl clumsiness had they been put into her hands when he saw her last. The change of manner in his old familiar friend, though that manner still lacked the subtle refinements and delicacies of Mrs. Sutton's, put Ellen and himself farther apart than he felt himself to be from Mrs. Sutton. It was strange, but it was so.

The dream-like influence of the dinner was about him still as he sat in the small room at St. James's Hall and listened to strains that made his ears tingle. They tingled with two sensations, those unsophisticated ears of his. In the first place, he felt compunction for having ventured to institute a comparison between the melodies that had been sweet to him in his native wilds with those that went swelling up and down in the gas-lighted hall, and that issued from the throats of those whom he was staggered to find "looked like real ladies and gentlemen." He did not dream of offending; he was only superably ignorant of all things out of his own orbit, when Arthur Eldale bent forward to Mrs. Sutton, imploring her to give him an introduction to a young lady who had just won an encore from her manner of singing "Clear and Cool."

"Don't be impatient; you shall meet her at dinner at my house next Wednesday," Marian replied; and then John executed his errand, and said:

"I thought Mrs. Sutton was a tip-top swell, Elly; does she visit such?"

"Such what?" Ellen asked, sharply, and before he could explain himself she went on:

"Pray don't make speeches of that sort, John; you don't know, and I can't tell you now, but it's a great honor—well, not that exactly, but quite a thing to be proud of to know artists."

"Painters?" John asked, inquiringly.

"Yes, painters, and—and—oh! all sorts of artists who are any thing—great singers, and great actors."

"Our squire never takes any notice of them down in our parts," John argued, stoutly.

"Our squire is an ignorant, old-fashioned old frump," Ellen replied, heretically; "he's just a little king down among you farmers, but he would quickly find his level in London. You see you are his inferiors," she went on, in an explanatory tone, "but in society he would only mix with his social equals or his betters, and be none."

"Who is Mr. Eldale?" John asked, when he had partially recovered about the most severe bluff a girl could administer to a man who loved her.

"Oh, everybody knows Mr. Eldale," Ellen replied, impatiently, and then she remembered that her young agricultural friend was nobody, and considerably added, "at least not to know him augurs yourself unknown; he knows everyone and goes everywhere, and he is so clever ever so many ways—paints, and sings, and rides like an angel; and he has such a house, Orrey Court, near to Hyde Park, and such lovely horses; it was one of his horses I was riding to-day," the girl continued, blushing with pleasure.

"He's very rich, I suppose?" the young farmer asked, slowly.

"Immensely. Aunt Marian says he draws at least ten thousand a year from a great brewery."

"And so you're in love with a rich brewer." John Wilmot's attempt at jocularity was painfully clumsy.

"Don't call him that, pray," the girl said, scornfully. "Several noblemen, earls, and dukes have shares in things, monster hotels and things of that sort, in this speculative age. In love with him! I might as well be in love with the Prince Imperial. Mr. Eldale might marry any one, Aunt Marian says. Don't talk trash about him and me."

"Any one might be glad to marry you, Elly," John said, with the feeble infatuation of a lover; "I only wish I could to-morrow."

"Mr. Eldale is a gentleman; you're different, you know." And Marian heard her pupil say this, and thought it was time to come to the rescue.

She came so gracefully, as was her wont. These women who wound with silver knives and bind the same with fine linen are likeable, though they are dangerous. They are likeable because of that habit they have of passing their hands over rough or sore places tenderly, with the tenderness that comes of ease of manner and self-possession of mind, and that has nothing whatever to do with the heart. So she came forward now, just as though she had heard nothing, and saw no necessity for such coming forward, and put herself and her kindness in sharp contrast with Elly's ingratitude toward the old friend whom she loved, though she was ashamed of him.

"What are you wishing about to-morrow?" she murmured. "Are you wishing what I wish, I wonder? Are you wishing that we may all ride together to-morrow between twelve and two? I have heard of your powers on horseback, Mr. Wilmot, from Elly. You can show me how to make Cavalier change his leg; he's get-

ting rough, you know, and it does worry me that he should lose his paces."

She said it all with an air of regarding Mr. Wilmot as one who was perfectly *au fait* with all that concerned herself and her horse. She was an adept in the art of putting men on good terms with themselves, which was only a preliminary step to their being put on good terms with her. She pleased that she might be pleased, in fact, and she generally got good interest for her outlay.

"I'm not much good 'cept cross country," he said, gruffly. How heartily he wished he was going "cross country" now, undismayed by supercilious glances of Mr. Eldale and his own old love, Ellen; "and I have nothing to ride up here," he added, with an abrupt exercise of his reflective powers.

"You can get a capital mount from Blackman," Mrs. Sutton replied. "Go there to-morrow morning and suit yourself, and join us in the Row at half past twelve." Then she remembered that John Wilmot might possibly be ignorant of who and what Blackman was, and (unlike Ellen in this) she would not crush him by seeming to see his hesitating comprehension of the situation of the well-known stables. "Let me assure myself that you will be my escort, our escort, to-morrow, Mr. Wilmot," she went on, winningly; "let my groom take the responsibility of selecting a horse for you, and start with us from my house to-morrow at a quarter past twelve, will you?"

Would he? What man under similar circumstances would not have done the same thing as John Wilmot did gladly—namely, promised to be with Mrs. Sutton at any hour, and to ride with her on any horse she liked? And when he had promised—a little more loudly than was perhaps well in a temporary lull in the concert—he looked at Ellen, and tried to make her eyes speak approval of his acquiescence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE ROW.

Mrs. SUTTON was already dressed for her ride when John Wilmot went into her drawing-room the following day. She was standing by the window gently switching her side with her whip, with a look of impatience on her face. She turned quickly as the door opened, and the impatient expression vanished instantly.

"Ah! it is you," she said; "I have been watching for you." Then she gave him her hand kindly, so kindly that it made him think how different the niece, his old love, was to her aunt, his new friend.

"Ellen is late," Mrs. Sutton went on: then they heard the sharp trot of a horse rapidly approaching, and Marian laughed, and added, "the signal for her to make her appearance is sounded."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Sutton?" the young farmer asked.

"Mr. Eldale's horse's hoofs," she replied.

It was on the tip of his tongue to exclaim—

"Does she care for him, then?" but he refrained, and only said, "Is Ellen going to ride his horse again to-day?"

"Yes," Mrs. Sutton said; and then she held her hand out toward him and asked him. "Is it not abominable that gauntlet gloves should only be made in sizes too large for me? These bag and make my hands look horrible."

"That they don't," he said, bluntly. Sore as his heart was about Ellen he could not help seeing Mrs. Sutton's hand, and seeing it, he could not help admiring it. It was a lovely hand in truth, a far prettier hand than had ever been held out in friendship or flirtation to the young farmer before. Clearly it belonged to a class above him. He felt this, and sighed as he remembered that the lady who owned it was the aunt of the girl he wanted to marry. He recovered his spirits as he reflected that she was only the aunt by marriage, no blood relation at all, in fact.

"I wish Mr. Eldale would lend me such a mare as Ellen rides," Mrs. Sutton said, presently, a little complainingly; "my horse pulls at me cruelly always when I am riding with other people, especially when I ride with Ellen, for she lets her mare pull ahead of mine, and Cavalier can't stand that. Will you be my escort to-day," she said, winningly, "and so save my poor hands from being torn to pieces?"

"Yes, if you like," he replied, a little discontentedly, and then Ellen came down and they started, Mr. Eldale and Ellen falling behind at once, and Mrs. Sutton absorbing as much of the rustic Apollo's attention as she could by playing off (through the unsuspected influences of a spur) every trick of "riding" that she knew.

He felt aggrieved in a measure, this rustic Apollo, on whom this graceful woman of the world believed herself to be conferring a colossal boon by noticing him at all. He felt himself to be aggrieved for all this condescension. He had come up expressly to see Ellen, and to win Ellen back into the right way of thinking as regarded himself. He had come up for this end and for no other; and it had been in his programme that he would hold himself aloof, not haughtily, but independently, from such of her people as had chilled her heart toward him. These were the ends he had come up for, and he had not fulfilled one of them. How should he have done so, when he had nothing but his honesty of purpose, and his ignorance of all things beyond his farmyard and turnip-fields to oppose to the subtlety of this gentlewoman bred and born who had set herself against his plans.

The dainty lady managed him well. The Row was crowded, and many of Mrs. Sutton's acquaintances pulled up to speak to her as she reined in close to the railings at the Piccadilly end of the ride. People were curious to know who Mrs. Sutton had caught in her toils, for Marian's peculiarities were no secrets. "Handsome, but bad style," was the verdict pro-

nounced after the first keen, apparently careless glance bestowed on the young man whose seat, hands, and clothes were all perfect; but who lacked the nameless something which gentlemen possess.

John Wilmot was very silent, and for this Marian was heartily grateful. Had he insisted on talking before any of her friends, his pronunciation would have broken down her plans of keeping him away from Ellen, and so giving Ellen a chance with Mr. Eldale—whose money in the family was to be the family's salvation, Marian thought. But John Wilmot brooded over his inability to get speech with Ellen in silence when they paused by the railings, and when they were cantering down the Row, he might say what he liked, no one could hear him.

She was very like a cat playing with a mouse in her manners to this "son of the soil," as she called him to herself. She knew every art, every trick, every bit of finesse by which the taste of man can be touched, and his heart turned toward woman. And she practiced all she knew. Giving him attention, sweet smiles, kind words, asking his opinion on subjects of which he might reasonably be supposed to have one, and generally not suffering him to feel himself at a disadvantage while he was with her. And all these things which Marian did Ellen left undone, being deficient in that fine tact which would have made her aunt please and flatter both men under similar circumstances.

Meanwhile the foiler was being foiled. Externally the arrangement which clever Marian had made was carrying itself out beautifully; but in reality it was as complete a failure as it deserved. It was all a waste of time and talent that Mr. Eldale should have been lured into offering his horse to Ellen, and maneuvered into a position at her side in the crowded Row, for he was chafing in spirit the whole time, and laughing bitterly at the weakness which could conceive itself to be capable of compromising him into making an offer to the vulgar little country girl to whom he was only kind for the sake of her amusing, pretty, interesting young aunt. Mr. Eldale had an aptitude for many things, but he had no aptitude for being married against his will, and it would never be his will to marry Ellen.

Already the poor girl was beginning to pay the penalty demanded of those who play with fire. She had commenced by regarding Mr. Eldale as the stars above her, and as she had said to John Wilmot the night before, as the Prince Imperial. But at last he was so kind and considerate, and he seemed to wish her to ride his horse, and other versions of the King Cophetua story would obtrude themselves on her mind, and she was only a woman. At last love began to mingle itself insidiously with admiring reverence, and to poison all the future to her when she fancied that she might have to pass it with John Wilmot, instead of with the graceful gentleman who would sooner have cut his throat than marry her.

It made her tremble, and her heart went down with a dull thud, when after a short trot they pulled up at some distance from Mrs. Sutton and John Wilmot, and Mr. Eldale broke silence by saying:

"I suppose it is coming to a climax by *la belle* aunt devoting herself to him so entirely: he is a fine young fellow—when is it to be?"

"When is what to be?" Ellen stammered out, with a mixture of pain and mortification that she had never experienced about the subject before. She knew what he meant quite well, and it hurt her horribly that he should speak of the man he supposed she would marry as "a fine young fellow," just as though John were nothing more.

Then pang the second smote her. He was "a fine young fellow," and he was nothing more. Her heart swelled with sorrow that it should ever have been given to one on whom Mr. Eldale looked down. "Why did he come up to shame her?" she thought, with the tears in her eyes. And then Mr. Eldale looked at her, and marked that she sat badly, and that her face was puffed up with heat and suppressed emotion, and wondered why he suffered himself to be seen with such a pair of bumpkins. "Why does not Marian get rid of them both; let them go back to their native wilds and marry; what can her little game be?" he soliloquized, as he saw and understood the full force of the order of the little airs and graces which Marian was bringing to bear on the "rustic Apollo."

That morning's ride was not too pleasant to any of them, for each wished for another companion, or for that companion to be in another mood. Vague dread—vague depressing dread of an unhappiness to come which she could not avert, darkened Ellen's soul. Whatever out-look she gazed through she saw nothing but pain and disappointment for either John or herself. And this feeling of utter inability to avoid giving pain to one who is dear as friend still, who has been dear as lover, is agonizingly painful. If he would only "speak out," as she called it ("he" being Mr. Eldale), and John would only go away and wear his heart out in silence where she could not be a witness of his sufferings, the sun of happiness might irradiate her path once more. But, as things were now, it was as much as she could do to keep up a fair exterior, and not seem the despondent, love-sick, untrained-in-the-art of concealment, country damsel that she was.

"What are your plans for to-night?" Mrs. Sutton asked of John Wilmot, when at about half past one they turned out of the Row, and wended their way homeward. It's useless, I suppose, expecting you to sacrifice to us at kettledrum at five?"

"What is that?" he asked.

"One of our latest, nicest follies; tea and talk before dinner. Will you come, though? of course you've a thousand other things to do?"

"I have nothing else to do," he replied.

"Now, Mr. Wilmot, I own I deserved that answer, for even appearing to suppose that I might charm you away from all your other claims; of course you have

a great deal to do—still be with us at five, will you?"

"Would he?" of course he would, when the neatly-worded invitation was backed by such a pair of appealing eyes.

"Now—see how exacting we women grow in proportion to the concessions made: will you drive with us after luncheon? I can introduce you to the best ices in London, so I am worth going with, I assure you."

"Is Ellen going?" he asked, bluntly.

Mrs. Sutton nodded assent, and then John Wilmot felt that he had nothing whatever to urge against her proposition. Surely, during the course of the drive, he would be enabled to say those few potent words to Ellen which he had traveled up town expressly to utter.

They went home to luncheon—to a well-ordered luncheon, that, like its predecessor, the dinner of the day before, made John Wilmot fancy Ellen far above him again while she was eating it. Still, for all his fidelity, he could not help comparing Ellen with her aunt. It came to him to see that the elder lady managed her figure and her movements in her habit better than his affianced bride. The narrow, clinging folds of cloth did not hamper or fetter Mrs. Sutton in the slightest degree—it became drapery of the most becoming description under her treatment. But Ellen looked far from at home in the garb; she was as bewildered by it apparently as soon as she came off her horse, and this John Wilmot felt sorry for and surprised at; for he did not know that it is not given to one woman in a thousand to be a perfectly "free and fearless thing" in a habit, when walking on the earth.

The luncheon occupied a long time; and then Mr. Eldale took leave of them, and the ladies went off to dress. By-and-by the carriage was ready, and Mrs. Sutton came down alone, and so exquisitely arrayed that John Wilmot almost forgot that she was alone for a minute or two. She had been a bewitching beauty to the unsophisticated Apollo in her hat and habit; she was simply bewildering to him now in one of Horstense's highest triumphs.

"Won't Elly come?" he recovered his judgment to the extent of asking this question, as he followed the lady, who was flattering his boyish pride so easily, down stairs. Mrs. Sutton just looked back over her shoulder—and the gesture she made was very graceful—and laughed.

"She has a headache, Mr. Wilmot, so you must accept my society alone, in default of better. Ellen will be better by five o'clock: can you put up with me alone?"

He made a clumsy effort to break the chain that was beginning to encircle him.

"You don't mean what you say," he blurted out; "you think I ought to be pleased enough to go with you, if you can put up with me; that's what you mean, is it not?"

He faltered a little as he asked this; it would have hurt him so much, poor fellow! to be told the truth, though he asked for it.

She was giving him her hand to help him in even as he spoke; and she gave him just a tiny pressure as he concluded.

"How exacting you all are!" she whispered, smiling; "you will have the compliment in words as well as in deed always. Why should I ask you to go with me if I did not wish it?"

"I hardly know," he exclaimed; and then he got in by her side, and the door was banged and the step put up, and they rolled off, he thinking what a blessed thing it would be for him if Ellen were only like her aunt, and she thinking that the farmer was not worth the candle; that her vanity would never receive sufficient gratification from the adulation and adoration of this rustic to compensate her for the strain it was on her to entertain what she denominated "merely a handsome clown."

John Wilmot thought it strange that, in what appeared to him to be an interminable, inextricable wilderness of streets and squares, they should meet Mr. Eldale. They had pulled up at Gunter's doors; and Mrs. Sutton was placidly eating an ice, and thinking what a superb footman John Wilmot would make, and John Wilmot was half blushing at being the escort of a lady who was committing what he had been taught to consider the solecism in manners of eating in the street, when Mr. Eldale sauntered out, and came up to Marian's side of the carriage.

"You here?" she said, laughing.

"It surprises you very much, does it not?"

"No; nothing surprises me," she answered, carelessly handing the plate to John Wilmot to carry in for her royalty—likewise royally leaving it to him to pay for her luxury. "Nothing surprises me that you do," she repeated.

"Do I not do what is pleasing to you now, Marian?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Mrs. Sutton, you mean," she laughed, holding up her hand warningly. "No, you do not do what is pleasing to me when you insist on remembering what you ought to forget, and on forgetting what you ought to remember."

"What do I forget?—very little, I assure you," he said, quickly; and Mrs. Sutton had only time to say "Do be careful," before John Wilmot came back.

"Where now, Circe?" Mr. Eldale asked, moving from a recumbent to an erect position, and drawing on the one pale gray glove which he had taken off while he was speaking to Mrs. Sutton.

"What a simple one I should be!" she replied, shrugging her shoulders. "Where?—well, to tell the truth I have seen and been seen enough to-day. I shall go for a quiet drive in Richmond Park. Good-by: come to me at five and tell me the news."

And she drove off, nodding and laughing to her friend, causing John Wilmot to get dazzled, and (for some reason or other) to wonder where her husband could be all this time.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SILVER-GILT.

LIONEL TALBOT and Miss Lyon had gone through the first, and perhaps the worst phase of an engagement. They had declared their intentions, and to many whom it did not concern, even remotely. This latter statement must, however, be accepted as a truth without questioning; for if the subject were sifted, ingenious gossips would prove (or "nearly") prove, which with the majority of women is enough) that everybody who has ever spoken to or seen a bride, or bridegroom, has a right to offer felicitations, so dubiously worded that they sound like condolences, and to suggest the existence of causes and impediments to the union of the principal powers.

It must be borne in mind that the neighborhood in which the fact broke out was a country one; that its interests were small; that its older inhabitants existed rather than lived; and that, socially, and, above all, intellectually, stagnation reigned. These conditions fully understood and accepted, as one learns to accept measles, bores, and other drawbacks to life indifferently, the results are to be guessed with precision. No man or woman would be wronged by the marriage when it did take place; but for all that, when the first report of it was heard in the land that was so barren of news, the teeth of envy, hatred malice, and all uncharitableness were gnashed upon the pair, who had not even the grace to smart under the bites.

While Mrs. Sutton, up in London, was trying to recover the ground her husband had lost through her brother in the monetary world, by putting John Wilmot and Ellen asunder, for the sake of securing Mr. Eldale and his wealth in the family, Blanche and Lionel had been using their brains in a more legitimate manner. There was a strong family feeling—a good, true-toned chord of sympathy between the Talbot brothers, and Lionel's desire, for she was strongly possessed by the womanly weakness of liking for the man who would have loved her best.

He had taken the tidings of his brother's engagement in a far better spirit than they had dared to hope he would have done. Beatrix had been deputed to tell him about it; and Beatrix had done her duty well. That is to say she had told him quietly, and she had never seemed to see how pale he got, and then how flushed, and how his hands went up and covered his face for one moment of abandonment as he listened.

When they all meet in the evening, just before dinner, there was no parade of the fact that might be painful to him made. Blanche was speaking to Frank, who was as buoyantly happy on the occasion as it became Frank to be; and Lionel was reading a notice of an exhibition at Manchester, to which she had sent several of his pictures.

"Place aux dames," Edgar said, going up to Blanche; "my heartiest wishes for your happiness; but I was astonished."

"So was I," she said, laughing and blushing a little. And then Edgar turned to his brother, and gripped Lionel's hand; and the congratulations that would be the hardest to offer were over.

A great many people were good enough to declare it to be an "ill-advised match;" for Miss Lyon had the reputation, among the broad-minded denizens of the neighboring nooks and corners, of being "fast," because she was fascinating; and extravagant, because she regarded beauty, and would have it upon and about her if she could. Naturally their list of acquaintances was a small one, and they did not mark one "intimate friend" upon it. But when the few who knew them down here came, curiosity developed intimacy in a manner that was most marvelous—the battery of inquiry being chiefly directed against the mother, who was willing to tell everything that she knew, if only it would have appeased them.

"Rather a rash thing for Miss Lyon to do, is it not?" one asked. And when Mrs. Lyon, with a ghastly vision of Lionel's having a first wife in the back-ground, and being by-and-by transported for bigamy (else why would it be rash for Blanche to marry him?) asked, affrightedly, "Why?" the lady went on:

"Oh! unless he can maintain her, of course: if he can, as she has been accustomed to be maintained; but he must have more than anybody supposes if he can."

"Five hundred a year won't keep them, as she will want to live," another judicious friend observed; and when Mrs. Lyon repeated this prophecy to Blanche, the latter replied, brightly:

"We shall raise that between us easily enough, mamma, you can tell any inquiring friends."

"Between you?" Mrs. Lyon cried, in horror-stricken accents; "you're not going to disgrace yourself by going out as governess again, especially when you're married."

"Never fear that, mamma; I shall never try to combine such conflicting elements again, believe me." Then she got up, rather nervously, and added, "I have a greater surprise for you than the announcement of my marriage. I have made my mark in a way that all who love me may be proud of. I have written a book that has put me on a platform where a queen might be proud to stand; and now I am going on to write in my own name, and to take all the honors that come to me to myself as my very own, to myself."

Mrs. Lyon did not understand her daughter's elation; only an artist can sympathize with one; but she was rejoiced to hear that the occupation into which her daughter had thrown herself with all the bright *verve* and vigor characteristic of her, was so glorious a one. And then Blanche, whose head was just a little turned by this success of hers, brought together a lot of reviews, and read them aloud, and believed in them, tyro that she was, when they flattered her for her skill in psychology, and prognosticated her rapid rise.

Her art life, her inner life, her other life; it would have been a mine of wealth to her even if her heart-life

had been dull and void. As it was it was such a fitting accompaniment to the brilliant strain love made of life. The girl was almost too happy. Both as woman and artist she was being so well dealt with by fate. "And it will be dearer to me; it will come home nearer to me, when I get it in my own name, Lal," she said to her lover: "to read sweet phrases of one's self as the 'author of so-and-so,' is sweet; but it will be sweeter now that I have made up my mind to write under my own name; and it will be sweeter still," she added, "when it will be as your wife that I win whatever I may win."

"We had better live in town, that you may have the advantage of literary associates," he said.

"Yes, just long enough for me to get to know some of the stars in the literary heaven; then we'll come and settle here in some place near to Frank and Trixy (for that will be Lal)."

"Won't you find that dull?"

"No; surely anyone who cares for our society might come to us in the autumn; there are just three or four, Lal, whom I began corresponding with as strangers, when I commenced writing, that I should like to know more of when I am settled down here."

"A little of the Bohemian element down here will be like water in a dry land," Lionel said, laughing; "how will it ever arrive to you to entertain and be entertained in a country clique, Blanche? You're wishing more than you wot of, child," he added, seriously, "in proposing that this should be your permanent home."

"When I suffer 'more than well' twould suit philosophy to tell 'we can go off for a breath of more invigorating mental air'; and, after all, Lal, in any place we can live for each other and ourselves; we need never be bored: whoever is wisest and brightest in this country-side is sure to be drawn toward the sole representative of current literature; and it's the mistress of a house makes the society of it, remember. My house can never be dull."

"People may say it is not decorous if you make it too pleasant," Lionel said, smiling.

"Then they will be stupid, and against stupidity even the gods fight in vain, as you know. I am not afraid of anyone whose thoughts are worth my thinking about considering me aught but decorous; are you, Lal?"

"No," he said, "my darling; you are all that a woman should be, and that a man can want."

CHAPTER XXV.

QUICKSANDS.

THERE can be no doubt about the fact of weddings being very wearying things to all whom they concern. From the moment that it was openly decided upon that Lionel Talbot and Blanche Lyon should take one another "for better and worse," very soon bustle and confusion reigned lords of all in the two families. Mrs. Lyon shed a few tears as soon as the matter was mooted, relative to the impossibility of her getting things ready for the marriage.

"You must be married from your mother's house, Blanche; and I have no house for you to be married from," the old lady said piteously, when Lionel pleaded for an early day being named; and then when Blanche urged that all that they either of them deemed essential was a church, a ring, and a priest, Frank Bathurst started forward with the announcement of his intentions concerning the nuptials of his friend.

"My cousin must be married from my house, Mrs. Lyon," he said, eagerly. "I am her nearest, male relative, though we don't bear the same name unfortunately"—he added, *sotto voce*. "I'm bound to give the wedding breakfast and her away, and I will do both very jollily. It's settled so, eh?"

"Yes," Blanche said, quietly, "settled and sealed with our heartiest thanks." And when she said that, Frank rejoiced in having had the resolution to brave the pang it cost him to offer to give her away to another man.

It was useless to delude himself with the assertion that it did not cost him a pang. It did cost him one, and a very sharp one too; but he bore it manfully, betraying it only to Lionel, not to the woman who caused it. The love he had felt for Blanche, slight as she deemed it, and superficial as it had been shown, had made him very loyal. Lionel's wife should have no reason for thinking with a too pitiful tenderness of Lionel's friend.

Beatrix was to be the only bridesmaid. Blanche Lyon was not the type of girl who has made sacred promises to at least a dozen dearest friends as to their attendance upon her at the altar on the most important day of her life. This rather pleasing truth came out when Frank Bathurst said, one night:

"The auspicious event is so rapidly approaching that it's getting time for us to make preparations to meet it. Those big boxes that are always arriving mean that you are doing your part well and truly, Blanche; but how about the procession?"

"There will be ourselves to go," Blanche answered, "It doesn't much matter how we go provided I and Lal get there."

"Why don't you have a regular army of beings in tulle, to see your train safely up the aisle, and you safely through the service?"

"Indeed, no," Miss Lyon said, laughing; "I never played Hermia to any one's Helen; I never make undying friendships that last, as a rule, one month. Trixy is my most intimate friend."

"Blanche never would see the advantage of being popular with her own sex," Mrs. Lyon said, lamentingly. "I always tell her that it is a pity, and that she will find that I am right some time or other; but Blanche is very obstinate, very obstinate indeed, Mr. Bathurst."

"Don't impress that truth too much upon Lal, mamma," Blanche said, laughing. "Frank may hear

it with safety; but Lionel might feel obstinacy to be an impediment, and I might be ignominiously jilted."

"If I thought that of him, I would not trust my happiness in his hands, if I were in your place," Mrs. Lyon said, with as much severity as she was capable of expressing. Severity was not Mrs. Lyon's forte. Blanche was not crushed by it; but it is irritating to be told by a person whose knowledge of the case in question is slight, what he or she would do were he or she in your peculiar plight. In spite of the real, genuine joy she was knowing in the realization of her love-dream, Blanche was irritated out of all happiness for the moment by her well-meaning mamma.

"If I didn't think everything that is good of Lionel I should not marry him. You may be very sure of that."

"Ah, one never knows a man till one marries him," Mrs. Lyon replied, shaking her head. "They seem all that's fair and plausible beforehand; but afterward—

Here Mrs. Lyon paused and shook her head, as though her recollections of what happened afterward were the reverse of agreeable.

"Well, mamma, what arrangement would you suggest that might remedy that evil?" Blanche said, when her mother hesitated. "The good old rule that we take each other upon trust can not be amended, in my humble opinion."

"Ah!" the old lady said, shaking her head in a way that was burlesque on wisdom, "girls don't know when they're well off, or they'd stay as they are and not be in such haste to marry, wouldn't they, Mr. Bathurst? But so it is: they are glad to leave their mothers, who have thought for them and waited on them from the hour of their birth, for the first stranger who asks them."

"You see, Frank, mamma desires you to understand that I have 'jumped' at my first offer, as my enemies would say," Blanche said, laughingly. She had recovered that seldom-lost good-humor of hers, which could stand any strain that was made on it now save aught that might be interpreted as a slight on Lionel. That she could not tolerate. All the love-loyalty within her rose up in rebellion at the bare idea, causing her to feel that love was lord of all with her, in a way that did make Frank regret her very keenly for a minute or two. So, having recovered her good temper, she gave a reading of her mother's speech that she would not have given if it had been the right one; and Frank accepted her allusion in the way she intended him to accept it, and replied:

"Poor girl, couldn't she get any fellow to make it what the gentle bard of modern domesticity calls 'his chief aim in life' to win her for his wife before Lal fell into the snare?"

"My daughter has not been so utterly devoid of opportunities of marrying as you seem to imagine," Mrs. Lyon said quickly, bridling her head as she spoke. "Of course every one now will imagine, from the hastiness of the whole of this affair, that she was anxious to get a husband, and that I was impatient to see her settled. It's not at all the aspect I like—not at all."

"What a lucky thing it is that Lal and I are indifferent to the aspect!" Blanche said, carelessly. "My dear mother, you do cause yourself such care and care for nothing. Life would not be worth having if we all paid such a price to the *vox populi* as you do."

"Blanche will find in time that she cannot disregard the opinion of the world lightly, as she esteems it now," Mrs. Lyon said to Frank, in a tone of toleration, for her daughter that was touching. "I have seen more of life than she has; but she never would take my advice."

"My dear mother, what part of it have I disregarded?" Blanche asked, quietly; then she added 'more quickly, "Certainly I went out as a governess when you thought it better I should stay at home in sublime seclusion, and starve rather than lose caste; but in what else have I opposed you?"

"She is not fit to be the wife of a poor man," Mrs. Lyon said petulantly, to Frank, as if he was in a measure responsible for Lionel's poverty and for Blanche's predilection, for sharing the same. "Not a bit for it. What they will do I don't know."

"The best we can, mamma," Blanche said, buoyantly.

"Ah, it's easy to say that," Mrs. Lyon replied, crossly. "You have not tried it yet. Well, there, my advice never is taken, so I may as well hold my tongue."

And Blanche, who could not help remembering that her mother's advice had never brought her any thing but boredom, and that she (Blanche) had been her own sole maintenance, chief counselor, and only guide, for many years, entirely coincided with her mother's latest opinion.

"Look here, Blanche," Frank Bathurst said, somewhat nervously, a few hours later in the same day; "Lal and you must start clear and comfortable, that's certain. You won't be too proud to accept a wedding present from me, will you?"

"I should be very much disgusted with you if you did not give me one," she replied, laughing. Then remembering that Frank's liberality might lead him to give more than either Lionel or she could comfortably accept under the circumstances, she hastily added, "Let me choose my present, may I?—a tea-service—because I'm fastidious to a fault about china, and I feel that your taste will be perfect."

"All right," Frank said, dryly; "you shall have that. But you must let me exercise the brother's privilege, and give you what I think you ought to have."

"You're too good to me," she said, in a low voice. The recollection that this man had wanted her for his wife smote her at times, and saddened her a little; he was so very generous to her in his disappointed love.

"Too good to you? That's impossible. Come, Blanche," he went on, as Lionel came and joined them, "I'll say my say to you before Lal, and have done with it. He has won you and I have failed; and I don't like either him or you one bit the less for it. I can bear my defeat, and can tell Lal that I think him the luckiest

fellow in the world, and that I am glad he is so lucky. You in return must show me that you don't think my love for you both is an utterly worthless thing by letting me use my own judgment in giving you what I think best. Say you will?"

"You want us to give a promise blindly," Blanche said, affectionately; "and I think we may dare give it to the one who has fulfilled my old concealed fancy about 'Bathurst's boy,' and taken such a fancy to me as I am proud to have inspired."

"That's neat," Frank said, approvingly. "Waste of words, though, rather. If you had said 'I will,' it would have saved trouble. Naturally, what you will Lal will also. Well, then, Miss Lyon, my idea is, that it's best for a woman to be independent of her husband, so far as money-matters are concerned, so I shall make you independent of Lal."

Lionel Talbot's blood rushed to his face as his old friend spoke. The proposition could never be acted upon. He felt that at once; but he also felt that the rejection of it must emanate from Blanche. All his fine sensibilities were in revolt at the notion of his wife being offered, by a man who had wooed her, that which he (Lionel) could not give her—an independent settlement; but he could not, for his pride's sake, make manifest that he was so revolted. He must trust to Blanche to show to others that his right to her was a real one with which no man might interfere.

"Frank wants to find out whether or not I am the unpleasantly strong-minded woman mamma most undesignedly represents me as," Miss Lyon said, quickly; "so he tests me by offering me what women who go in for their sex's rights sigh for—a state of independence. Dear Frank, how disgusted you would have been if I had fallen into your trap, and had not had the courage to aver that I belong to the old, weak, womanly order, that prefers being indebted to a lawful lord."

"By Jove! you're right," Frank cried, heartily. "You're right, and I was wrong to think for a moment that you could accept an ungraceful offer. Can you forgive me, Lal? You may, I think, for my folly brought out a bit of Blanche's best—her pride in you, old fellow!"

"That shall never be decreased by any fault of mine," Lionel replied. "Forgive you? Yes, I think I can forgive what flatters me so much as your appreciation of Blanche's deserts does; but for your comfort's sake I will tell you, Frank, dear old fellow, my wife won't be beholden to me for anything, as old women call it. She has a mine of independence within herself in the making of many books."

"I'll give her a plot for her next," Frank said, laughing; "the story of a modern Damon and Pythias loving the same lady, and Damon surrendering her, and bearing no malice about it. She can draw from the life—the *dramatis personæ* are before her."

He gave a half-questioning, half-pleading glance at Blanche as he spoke. His bright, light love for her was not dangerous, and Lionel felt that it was not dangerous; still, the avowal of it was only a touch less than painful to the one who thought so humbly of himself that he deemed he had only won by a head.

"Damon would never be guilty of the meanness of mentioning it if he meant it," Lionel said, quietly; and when he said that Blanche realized that the love of the one man and the liking of the other would give her a hard part to play.

"And Pythias would never be sensitively jealous if Damon did," she put in, hurriedly; "at least not if he respected the lady of his love as the loved of Damon and Pythias deserved to be respected. Since Frank is kind enough to give me the materials for a story, Lal, you must let me tell it in my own way. I shall handle it all so harmoniously for the lady, and for Damon and Pythias too."

"And when shall we read it?" Frank asked, eagerly. The moment for half-sentimentalizing with him was gone, and he could be blithely gay about the business again.

"When? Always when we are together, and I hope that may be very often," she said, gayly; and then both men felt that however it had been before, her heart was wholly Lionel's now—so wholly that she had no fear of herself. She had got herself past some terrible quicksands in safety; and it was no slight thing to have done. Had she steered one half point to the right or left of that straightforward course which it had been her choice and policy to pursue, she would have brought the little bark in which Lionel and herself had shipped for life into troubled waters. As it was, she had, by means of a steady hand and an eye undimmed by vanity or deceit, gone direct to the harbor of refuge Lionel's love made for her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARRIED,

MR. AND MRS. MARK SUTTON came down to Haldon the day before the wedding, accompanied by their niece Ellen Bowden, in whose favor Blanche had relented, in so far as allowing her to be a bridesmaid went. Not one of the party, including the bride herself, were in very brilliant spirits on the marriage morning. Now that it had really come to the point, the two men who had loved Blanche felt it to be harder than they had fancied to lose her.

"I hope from my heart, old fellow, that you will be as happy as you both deserve to be," Frank Bathurst said, clapping Lionel on the shoulder. "Don't you feel shaky about it, though?"

"Not a bit," Lionel replied.

"Then you've a bundle of nerves. I should."

"What should you do?" Edgar Talbot asked, as he came in to his brother.

"Feel awfully nervous if I stood on the brink of a similar precipice to the one Lal is on just now."

"So should I," Edgar said, "especially if I were no more sure than Lionel is that I could keep my wife as my wife ought to be kept."

"Oh, as for that, Lal will be as right as a trivet," Frank said hurriedly. The conversation had taken a turn that might reasonably be supposed to be the reverse of agreeable to Lionel; and Frank was sorry for this, and also sorry for the cause of its being thus turned. There must be a considerable amount of bitterness, he knew, in the heart of a man who could utter so thinly-veiled a reproach to a brother on his wedding morning.

"Any way, I am not going half-way to meet any trouble, much less one that Blanche will bear with me," Lionel said, coolly.

"You will be obliged to work a trifle less conscientiously, that is all," Edgar said, laughing.

"That I shall never do. I will pay my wife the respect of, at least, not deteriorating."

"You will do well enough, probably, old fellow," Edgar said, with sudden heartiness; "quite as well, and better too, than most men; but you'll study the simple expedient a little more attentively than you have done hitherto, if I'm not mistaken."

"You are mistaken. I cannot stay to try and convince you of it just now, for we must be off."

Then they went away to the village church, the bells of which had been clanging in hilarious dis-harmony all the morning.

To be married in a large town, in the midst of a concourse of people who are superbly indifferent as to whether one is going to be married or buried is a calm and comfortable proceeding when compared with being married in a village, where every one has some pet theory to account for every change of complexion and variation of expression in the faces of the chief objects concerned. The bridal party would have deemed themselves blessed had the inspection lasted only during their progress through the church; but the churchyard gateway was too narrow to admit a carriage, consequently they had to get out and walk between rows of observant fellow-creatures, on a rough gravel path, that was, as Mrs. Sutton felt with anguish, detrimental to her boots and train. Ellen Bowden, to whom six months before, the scene would have been one of fairy-like beauty and splendor, had dreamed a more gorgeous dream lately, and so rather looked down upon this reality.

"If I am ever married, it shall not be in the country; I am quite determined about that," she whispered to Trixy; and when Trixy replied:

"I dare say Mr. Wilmot will agree to any place that seems good to you," Ellen blushed with confusion, and said:

"One never knows how things of this sort may turn out, does one, Miss Talbot? Aunt Marian says it is so foolish to speak about engagements ever, for fear they should be broken off. Do you know Mr. Eldale, Miss Talbot?"

"Only by repute."

"Oh, I'm sorry you don't know him," Ellen said, in disappointed accents. She wanted to talk about him more than she had wanted to talk about John Wilmot for many weeks. It was hard upon her, she felt, that Miss Talbot could not take the wild interest in her subject which knowledge of him would have surely given.

"I am very sorry," she repeated. "He is so charming."

Then her poor little foolish heart throbbed high at the thought of how grand a thing his wealth and taste would make her wedding with him, if she were so fortunate as to have won him as he seemed to be won by her; and this thought caused her to look rather scornfully on the small band that stood by the pair. "I will have twelve bridesmaids; and I shouldn't feel married in such a plain white dress as she wears; but it's all right enough for people in their position, I suppose," the daughter of the deceased grazier thought of the daughter of an old and honorable house.

"It was not half as bad as I expected; still I am very glad it is over—so glad and happy, Lal," Mrs. Lionel Talbot exclaimed to her husband, the instant they were out of the church.

"And I shall be glad when we're off," he replied, tenderly; "for Edgar is breaking down fast. If he does utterly, my darling, there must be a gulf between us; no man, not even my own brother, must show love for my wife. Let us leave them to eat the wedding breakfast without us; let us be off at once."

"As you will. Whatever you wish to do I shall be sure to like to do," she said, tenderly. So they were off at once, after just shaking hands with the others, on the brief trip that was to be the prelude of that earnest battle of life they were bound to fight together.

"The artist and his wife had a very humdrum wedding," Ellen Bowden wrote to John Wilmot. He had forced her to write to him from Haldon; and she kept her promise, though she kept it unwillingly. "There was no style about it at all. I couldn't endure such an affair; but I suppose it was the right and proper thing for people without money. Some people blame them very much for having married on next to nothing: such matches never turn out well. I hardly know when we go back to town; so I should be sorry for you to waste more of your time in waiting to see us on our return. My uncle and aunt unite with me in kindest regards.

"Yours very truly, ELLEN BOWDEN."

"I don't think that Arthur Eldale can think that a compromising letter, if he should ever chance to see it," Ellen thought, and a self-complacent expression crept over her face as she thought it. She had violated no truth in averring herself to be his "very truly," at least she had not violated truth in the letter, though she had in the spirit. She was his very truly, in so far as being well-disposed toward him as a friend went; but to herself she confessed that she would prefer being

a friend to him at a distance for the future. Her retrospective regard for him in the abstract was a colossal thing; still, colossal as it was, it was liable to collapsing suddenly into the most diminutive proportions under the influence of the dread she had that it might mar her future prospects with another.

Meanwhile the newly-married people whom she was pitying were all on their way to the place they had determined to pause and take breath in before commencing the actual fight for fame and fortune which they both were resolved to make. It was a sweet, quiet, secluded village in a midland county, where they made their first halt, a village about half a mile from the banks of the Thames, in the heart of the fairest of that flat, fair, midland county scenery, which is so fascinating in its park-like prettiness and quiet. Sheets of silvery moonlight flooded the scene when they reached the little inn that stood on the brink of one of the tributary streams that fall into the Thames. The house itself was gable-ended, thatched, covered with creeping plants, redolent of the presence of roses. As they stood together at the casement-window, looking out over the flower-bed-studded slope of grass, and on the shining river, the deep, tender happiness of love, realized so fully that it idealized everything, flooded the hearts of both, and the woman spoke:

"Lionel, what have I done to deserve this; to be placed here in the midst of such beauty; to be enjoying it with you?"

"According to my idea, you have done everything to deserve it," he replied. "You have made me supremely happy by giving me your love and the right to enjoy it."

"Such a poor return for the wealth of yours," she said, rather sadly. "Lal, the one thought that crushes me a little now and then is that I may be, not a 'burden'—I won't insult you by suggesting that you could ever feel me to be that—but a sensibly-felt weight. If I hamper you? If I impede your progress? The mere thought of it half maddens me."

Then he put his arms about her with that air of tenderly protecting strength which comforts a woman against her will—against her reason, very often—and told her that he was so strengthened and elevated by her love that his progress must be an upward one; and that even if it were not, she would be by his side to share it, and to see him make it.

"But if you are impoverished by your marriage, Lal? Life is a little harder to the man who has to fight for a wife as well as for himself."

"Harder perhaps; sweeter undoubtedly. Listen my child," he said, putting his hand on her brow, and holding her face up to fairly meet his gaze. "Listen, and believe me, Blanche. I never lied to any one yet—do you think I should lie to the one I love best? Believe me when I say that I mean the words I uttered this morning. Whatever comes to me of sorrow or joy, of wealth or poverty, I thank God that you have vowed very solemnly, my sweet, to share it with me."

"Oh, Lal! what a lovely opening chapter it is!" the easily consoled woman—who showed her love by being thus easily consoled—replied, as she let her head nestle forward trusting upon his shoulder. "What a lovely opening chapter it is!" she repeated, earnestly.

"Yes," he replied, laughing; "and as is right, there are only two figures in it. In the earlier stages of romances, whether of real life or not, it is well that the two chief figures should stand quite alone—should be clearly outlined."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FAMILY AFFECTION.

It was late in the autumn before the young married people left the little inn on the brink of the stream for a settled home of their own. "The prettiest, quietest place we can afford, without giving a thought to the social consideration it is held in, will be the place for us," Lionel said to his wife, when the question of their future abode began to be first debated seriously between them; and Blanche agreed with him in this, as indeed she did about most things.

"I think you are right, Lionel. I will go to Highgate, if you like, or to Camberwell, or to any other out-of-the-way district in which you may see fit to place me; it will be all one to me, so long as you are with me; and I have something nice to look at from the window. We have no old swell friends to be affected by our decline and fall out West." Then, as she finished speaking, she remembered that Marian Sutton had, with recently developed sisterly affection, promised to call on them as soon as they (the Suttons) came back to London; and she added, "Even Marian will forgive the locality for her brother Lionel."

"Marian and you will never be sufficiently intimate for the distance between you to be felt as a trial," Lionel replied.

"We are better apart, I think," Blanche said, heartily. "Nothing would give me the necessary amount of faith in Marian to make constant or even frequent intercourse between us desirable. I do"—

She paused, and her husband said: "You do what, dear?"

"Maybe I had better reserve my judgment. Speaking it can do no good."

"But I would rather that you did speak it to me, even though you judgment of my sister may be severe. You are my wife, and I have a right to share your thoughts. Tell me, darling!"

"Lal, what a mean-hearted wretch I should seem to myself if I, by a thoughtless word or two, made you think less well than you do of your sister. I will own to not liking her; but I will add, in justice to her, that I believe, at first, I only disliked her because she did not like me. My vanity was piqued; I was weak."

"At first that was your reason; but how about now?"

"Now I don't think her true; that is why I do not take to her, as we women call it. I think she has a

good deal of scratch in her, and if her soft, easy-going existence were disturbed, I think she would let her nearest feel that she had it without the faintest scruple. Lal, how can I dare to say that of a sister of yours? What a wretch I am!"

"At least you can love Trixy," he said, evading answering her direct question as to how she dared to question the moral veracity of his sister.

The young, loving, tenderly-regarded wife went down gracefully on her knees before the low lounge-chair in which her husband was sitting.

"Shall I confess, Lal?" she asked sweetly.

"To me, always, or Heaven help us both!" he answered, solemnly.

"Well, then, love is a gorgeous gift, and I don't give it readily. I have liked, and liked warmly, and been deceived and disappointed, and seen the object fall short of that of which I expected of it, ever so many times. Now, for some time, I have left off lavishing it. I like what pleases me, and interests me, and sympathizes with me; but I should scorn myself if I were to say that because a woman is your sister, for that reason alone I loved her."

"And can't you love Trixy for herself?" he asked, in a hurt tone. "She, at least, might command the highest sympathies; she is good, true and clever; what do you want more?"

"Like Dian's kiss, unasked, unsought.
Love gives itself, it is not bought,"

Blanche said, shrugging her shoulders. "I'm wrong morally, I have no doubt, but I am mentally right. You must know that when I took to loving you better than myself, Trixy and I were antipathetic to each other to the last degree, on account of another man for whom she did care, and for whom I didn't care, and who did care for me, and who didn't care for her. Now our relations are altered, as political reporters say; nevertheless I can't afford to say that Trixy is the one female being in the world who can make life sweet to me simply because she is your sister."

Lionel Talbot was silent. Conventionally he knew his wife to be wrong. She was refusing to take up the regulation burden of family affection for "the people" of the one whom she had married; but rationally he knew her to be right—there was no sufficient cause for it.

"Trixy and you will right yourselves in time," he said, stooping forward and kissing her brow. "Meanwhile, don't imagine you owe me anything that your own true heart is disinclined to pay."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MORE FAMILY AFFECTION.

"THE prettiest, quietest place we can afford without giving a thought to the social consideration in which it is held, will be the place for us," Lionel Talbot had said to his wife when the subject of their future abode had been under discussion. But pretty, quiet places that are accessible to bread-winners who must travel by omnibuses, are rare shots that slay those unfortunates with fatigue who are compelled to search for them. Lionel and his wife traversed many a weary mile of London suburb, lured on by the fallacious hopes the penny paper advertisements of "sequestered cottages in salubrious localities" had raised, before they fixed upon the spot in which they would first pitch their tent, and set up such humble household gods as can be procured by young people who marry on love, and whose fortune is in the future.

It was a small six-roomed house in a long, airy road, with an open space at the end of it occupied in imagination by a church, that was Mrs. Lionel Talbot's first married home. There was nothing pretty or romantic in the situation—nothing graceful or elegant in the interior arrangements. On the contrary, the view from the windows was of other houses precisely like unto itself, and within absence of decoration reigned—together, it may be added, with such a perfect love for each other as cast out all doubt and fear.

But though there was nothing pretty or romantic in the situation, nothing graceful or elegant in the interior of it, the house perfectly fulfilled one condition which they had made: it was quiet; and this quality in an abode has a matchless charm for those who are seeking to curry favor with fortune by their pen or pencil.

They went to work with hopeful hearts and willing hands as soon as they were settled—went to work at their respective arts, separating early in the morning, hard as it was to do so in these early days of life's realized romance, and not meeting again till the late dinner, which was eaten with the appetite that only comes from the knowledge that the labor and burden of the day is over. One of the six small rooms was made into a studio by Lionel, and another on the floor above it was given up exclusively to Blanche and the one luxury she had afforded herself—a writing-table of fair proportions on which the sheets of MS. could be thrown about without distracting care being given to the position in which they fell.

They were very happy in these days—very happy, despite being so entirely "out of the world," as Mrs. Sutton declared them to be when she came at length to see them.

"You can't expect people to call on you here," she said to Blanche; and when Blanche replied, "I neither expect nor wish them to call on me," Mrs. Sutton added, considerately: "And how bad for you as a writer, and Lal as an artist, to be living out of the world in this way! You'll both get bored; and when one's bored one's best goes."

"I quite agree with you; when we are bored our best will go," Mrs. Talbot replied, coloring freely. She was vexed by being put in the position of the pitied and imprudent one, by this woman who had been opposed to her from the very commencement of their intercourse.

"Of course you think that you are all-sufficient to each other—you have been married six weeks, I believe?" Marian laughed.

"Did you think Mr. Sutton and yourself all-sufficient to each other when you had been married six weeks?" Blanche asked, innocently. Then Mrs. Sutton got up, carelessly dragging her shoulders, and saying:

"Not at all; but I knew that his money, and the comforts it would surround me with, to be all-sufficient, and I have not proved mistaken."

Then she left Blanche (whom she had ruthlessly interrupted in an installment of a story for a magazine that was overdue) and went down to Lionel.

"Shall I disturb you?" she asked in silvery tones, giving an impatient rap at the locked door as she spoke. The instincts of the artist overcame the instincts of politeness, and Lionel answered:

"Not now, Marian; I'm really very busy."

"But I've something to say to you—something you ought to hear; do, Lal, let me in."

He opened the door quickly enough, and she glided in at once, and held up her face for him to kiss.

"I am very penitent for interrupting you, Lionel; but I did not wish to leave your house the first time I had ever entered it hurt, and sore, and unsoothed."

"Hurt and sore!" He repeated her words in astonishment.

"Yes," she said, softly. "I am only your sister, and she is your wife, and I suppose knows how to please you into forgetfulness of brotherly feeling."

"Are you speaking of Blanche?"

"Yes."

"Give my wife her name, then," he said quietly; "she is 'she' only to me."

Marian caused her eyes to look placid. The secret of sudden tears had been thoroughly discovered by this woman.

"Mrs. Lionel Talbot does not need you to take her part, Lal," she said, softly; "she can hit very hard now she dare."

"What do you mean?" he asked, weakly.

"What have I ever done, Lal, to her (or to anybody else for that matter) that she should suddenly rise up and ask me, in taunting tones, when I spoke of her young married happiness, whether I could speak with the same satisfaction when I had been married six weeks? It was hard of her to say that, Lal, when she must have known how it would cut me. Her life's venture has succeeded; mine has failed. Did I not know it already, that she thought it needful to take such ignominious triumph over me?"

"I cannot judge my wife unheard."

"I do not ask you to judge her, for your judgment would deal hardly toward me. Lionel, I am very far from being happy; and when I came from sisterly kindness, I was met by a jeer at that over which I am powerless. I have my troubles as well as the rest, thanks to our estimable Edgar. If ever a girl was sacrificed to her family, I have been."

"Poor Marian!" Lionel said fondly. He was entirely ignorant as to how her family had benefited by the sacrifice, still, as a man, he could not be harsh to her when she asserted that she had made it.

"Lionel," she said, quickly, looking up, "I am very unhappy; I am frightfully pressed by Hortense, and I dare not ask Mark for money. Can you give—lend me fifty pounds?"

"At the present moment I have not quite fifty shillings in the world," he said, dejectedly.

"Yet you married," she said, scornfully.

He knit his brows a little, and looked her firmly in the face.

"I married, trusting to God and such talent as I have to support her. I married without—I allow that—any consideration for other people's milliners' bills. What then?"

"I beg your pardon—I forgot," she said, hurriedly. "I omitted to tell you that Mark's last impoverishing effort was made to give Edgar the means of playing for the redemption of your pittance, which you have rashly allowed him to risk and lose."

"Has Mark suffered too?" he asked.

"Mark suffered too," she repeated after him, impatiently. "Do you call it suffering to lose all he has ever gained; and not that only, but his sister's money into the bargain—to lose it through Edgar! to lose it through my brother? Oh! I owe my family much."

She bent her head down and burst into a passion of tears; and her tears, as they streamed over her face, scalded her brother's heart.

"Things are worse than I thought them. We are men—Edgar and I; and our losses ought only to nerve us to further exertions, which I am ready to make. Don't reproach me, Marian; the risk Mark ran for the recovery of my pittance was run unknown to me. Blanche and I will not forget it, now we do know it."

Mrs. Mark Sutton lifted her face up in an instant, smiling through her tears.

"You have great faith," she said. "Your wife's, Mrs. Lionel Talbot's (I hope I speak of her respectfully enough) knowledge of the position into which we are plunged is likely to avail us much, I should imagine."

"You are speaking bitterly, Marian," he said calmly.

"I am speaking the words of soberness and truth, hard as they may sound to you. Granted that she had the will to help the family into which she has come (only to further encumber it)—grant that she has the will; she has not the power."

"Not at the present hour."

"Nor at any time in the future. Lionel, you are infatuated, blinded, deceived, if she has led you to suppose that the choicest works of her imagination are worth much more than the paper they are printed upon. Why, if she writes the tips of her fingers off, she can't make more than a hundred a year."

"We will not go into the question of what she may make, or what she does make. I know this of her, that when she can give help she will give it."

"Easy generosity; that time will be never," Mrs. Sutton said, turning to leave the room. "Spare me the humiliation of letting your wife know that I have been driven to ask you for money. Promise me that."

"As you will," he said drearily. His ideas had been rudely dispersed; his working hours roughly broken in upon; his wife had been attacked and he had not been quite able to defend her. Altogether his future was a touch less bright when he went down at two o'clock to luncheon than it had been when he left Blanche after breakfast. She was sitting at the head of the table when he entered, looking paler and more weary than he had ever seen the brightly-colored, active woman look before; and it was not in him at the moment to cheer her up at once.

"You look tired, Blanche," he began.

"I am; by what I cannot tell, unless it is by my utter inability to write three consecutive sentences of sense this morning," she replied.

"What is the obstacle?"

"It is thus; and I can't define it. Suddenly I lost my vivid interest—my heart—in my work. My plan of the plot seemed weak, tame, and unprofitable—the latter especially; and when I attempted to let the gay fancy lead me my pen became stubborn, and I fell to doubting the grammar of every word I wrote."

"You have been vexed about something," he said, suggestively.

"By something indefinable, then," she answered, quickly. "It will all be well with me again very soon, if I could only feel that 'very soon' would suit our purpose as well as 'now.'"

"Don't be despondent, my own darling. Remember whatever burden there is, it is not your back that is bound to bear it."

In an instant she made that effort to cast off care which women can make when the care is crushing the spirit of the man who is dearest to them.

"My back is ready to share it, dearest," she said, going over to him fondly. "Come, Lal, the truth shall be told now. Mrs. Sutton disheartened me a little—just a little—and then all fancy for glib fiction fled; and I have been feeling very unworthy of you and of myself."

"But you feel so no longer?"

"I feel so no longer. Honestly and with all my heart, I can assure you of that. How about yourself? What have you been doing?"

"Well—not much."

"What do you call 'not much,' Lal? Your 'little' means a great deal generally."

"I wish it did mean a great deal to-day," he said, a little moodily. "I had a long talk with Marian."

"What did Marian say to throw you out of gear?" his wife asked, coaxingly.

"You can't get on with her," he answered, abruptly; and Mrs. Talbot shook her head and laughed, and said:

"No, no, Lal, that is not your grievance; the root of the evil lies deeper. Tell it to me."

He looked at her, and he could not tell her so harsh a thing as that his untruthful sister had been able to give him a pang about his truthful wife. Love and reason both opposed themselves to such an exercise of veracity on his part. Marian had made him uneasy and suspicious, and in his heart of hearts he did feel that the weapons which she had used were not true and doughty ones. But for all that he could not help feeling that there was a little to be urged in extenuation of Marian also. If Blanche had uttered but a few words with even a lighter malicious meaning, of the sentences which Marian had ascribed to her—if she had done so, then Blanche was to blame and Marian was to be pitied. As he thought of this possibly extenuating clause in the page of Marian's misrepresentation Lionel felt that it was well within the bounds of possibility for a wife to be less perfect than she of six weeks' standing was on the day she became one.

"Tell it to me," she repeated; "say the sum of your troubles, and I will cast them up—and 'out,' I hope."

Then he told a few of the things which Marian had told to him, reserving only the taunts which Mrs. Sutton had uttered relative to the expediency of the match.

"The Suttons ruined! Marian poor. I don't realize that at all, Lionel."

"They will have to realize it soon, I fear."

"And how fearfully hard such realization will be to her, poor thing! Lionel, I am quite strung up again!"

"By the thought of another woman's privation?" he asked, laughingly, and in a tone that showed he did not mean what he had said.

"No, but by the thought that I may relieve that privation in the glorious 'time to come,' in which we artists have so comforting a faith. Marian may have her faults," Mrs. Talbot went on, with the judicial air which is the safety-valve both of the most sympathetic feeling and the sincerest spleen—"Marian may have her faults, but we will forget them all now, poor thing!"

Then the young husband, touched by the exceeding generosity of the sentiments that were strong in theory, and that had never been put to the rough test of practice yet, gave prudence her *conge* and went into further details respecting Marian's interview with himself.

"Wonderful thing it is that you women contrive so utterly to misjudge one another," he said. "Men never, or very rarely, fall into that error. Now there's Marian thinks that you dislike and would almost destroy her, I believe, when in reality you would aid her to the utmost."

"What did she say that could make you think that, Lal?"

"She did not say much, but she let me see that she felt hurt at your reminding her that hers was not a marriage of affection," Lionel said, deprecatingly.

"She said I did that—what next?"

"Nothing next, you dear ferocious little creature,"

Lionel said, smiling, as his wife came up to him and laid her crimsoned cheek upon her forehead, and grasped his hand in her own small, muscular, sensibly-strong white one.

"Nothing next? nothing to account for my remark?"

"Oh yes, she gave me a leading one on the happiness you seemed to be enjoying; she did say something about that, I suppose, Blanche."

"Yes, she said something about it," Blanche replied, absently. She was cut to the soul by this first evidence which had been given her of Lionel deeming it possible that she could be in the wrong—and resenting it.

"And you replied by contrasting your relative positions rather more freely than you would have done had you liked Marian better," Lionel replied, gravely.

"My poor darling, it was hard on you to be interrupted when you had got yourself into a good groove for work; but deal more gently with the erring another time for my sake."

"For your sake I will do anything," Blanche replied, passionately. "I will say all that I can say now to make you feel my fault less; I was too hasty, too severe altogether on Marian;" and then she halted, and did not add that she had not been altogether untried.

"That ample confession would gain absolution for far severer sins, my sweet," Lionel said, gently. Then as his wife went away, rather softly and sadly to her work again, he did wish that he had not forced her to make confession quite so ample; it savored slightly of humiliation, and it had been far from the wish of his heart to humiliate her. For the remainder of that day this consideration haunted him, causing him to paint less lightly and brightly than his subject, "Forming the Household of the Fairy Queen," demanded. But he dared not to break in upon that time which was money and honor to himself and his wife now by going up to her quiet room on a mission of reconciliation.

She meanwhile was having a tough tussle with herself up stairs in that little room where the fairest creatures of her brain had been born and were being nurtured. She had been thrown out of her grooves, ruthlessly thrown out of her grooves, for no sufficient end—for nothing, indeed, save for the furtherance of vexation in her spirits. Worse than this—far harder to bear than this original, upsetting, imagination-destroying fact, was the one that the man she had married seemed to think that she was in some trifling measure to blame for the uproar in her mind. She could not tell her husband how his sister had spoken of that mutual poverty which made their marriage such a reckless thing in her (Marian's) eyes. She could not do this, for the bloom of slight reserve hung about the loving intercourse of the young husband and wife as yet. Mistakenly, but femininely, she deemed it better to bear the burden of a secret which might pain him unshared by him than to give it half into his keeping, and so lighten the weight on her own mind and soul. In truth, she had it in her to be very generous—the pity of it was that the fruits of such generous growth do not ripen quickly.

"Twere long to tell, and vain to hear."

how long, how fiercely, and how unsuccessfully she struggled with herself, and still was powerless to do anything, or at any rate to do the thing she most desired to do. This first jarring together (it did not quite amount to a misunderstanding) of the chords which had been so finely attuned hitherto in the souls of her husband and herself, cost her such a twinge of anguish as can only be experienced once. The horrible truth came home to her that it was in her to give offense to Lionel, and in Lionel to take offense with her. He had done it now on what she, looking at the subject according to her lights, which were by no means dim, was justified in thinking very small provocation. She could not write of fictitious joys or woes—she could not evolve plots or depict characters that never existed—she could not wield the pen of a ready writer, with this crushing reality weighing down upon her heart. How she hated this cheap London suburb in which they dwelt when this feeling first came to pass! How she loathed the accessible locality, and long for the inaccessible woods in some far-off country district, where the burr of rivers that ran away and lost themselves in remote bays, and that rose in even more remote moorlands, and the coo of the wood-pigeons, would be the sole sounds she should hear! How she reproached herself for having been petulant—for having risked her all, her life's happiness, on such a trifles as the rise of this misunderstanding now seemed to her! How eagerly she listened now and again for some sound of Lionel—some sound that should forewarn her that he was coming up to condone her little offense against his family feeling! How slowly and sadly the day were itself in weariness! and finally she rose up as the dinner-hour struck, with her day's appointed work unfinished—with her head aching, and her heart sore, and the conviction strongly upon her that she was very much in the wrong.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"AND DOES NOT A MEETING LIKE THIS MAKE AMENDS?"

WHEN Ellen Bowden returned to town with her uncle and aunt Sutton, after the Talbot's marriage, she found that Mr. John Wilmot had not regarded her wish as to his not wasting his time by waiting to see them. There was a note from him among the other letters on the hall table, telling her that she would see him as soon as he could possibly come to her after receiving her acknowledgment of the receipt of this missive, and that when he came to her he should come with the determination of knowing what she purposed to do with him, and with herself.

She took in the contents of the letter as she ran up stairs, and when she reached her own room she sat down and tried to think what answer she should give him.

She could not trifl with him. Independent of her strong feeling that he would not suffer himself to be trifled with, was the equally strong one against doing it to such an old friend. She was very sure she could not trifl with him, but she was equally sure that she could not marry him. A vision of Arthur Eldale, and all the glories with which Arthur Eldale could surround her, rose up to prevent the possibility of her making such a *mesalliance*. But how should she tell John Wilmot this? That was the question.

"I will speak to Aunt Marian," she said to herself, at last; and then she got herself into her dressing-jacket, took her letter in her hand, and wended her way to her aunt's dressing-room. That lady was lying on a sofa, with a cup of tea in one hand and a long bill the items of which she was lazily overlooking in the other.

"I'm in a small trouble, Aunt Marian," the girl said, nervously, as she entered the room.

"And I'm in a big one," Mrs. Sutton replied, captiously. "Hortense does impose on me in the most glaring manner."

"Why do you go on dealing with her then?"

"Simply because I can't pay and have done with her, and she knows it. I have more than half made that woman's fortune, and now she is insolent to me; that is just the way with people—you load them with favors, and when you're down they turn upon you."

"But—down!—you're not 'down'?"

"No—oh be joyful: I'm not down in one sense," Mrs. Sutton said, rising up quickly and casting the long bill carelessly into an open drawer; "but that woman thinks I am, and acts upon her thought. Now tell me your small trouble."

"It is about John Wilmot." Ellen tried to speak very steadily, and failed.

"Well, what about him?" Marian asked, sharply.

"You may read his letter, if you like," Ellen replied; "there is nothing in it that you may not see, as you know so much already."

Then Mrs. Sutton read John Wilmot's letter, and as she read it a little satirical smile flashed out from her blue eyes and flitted over her mouth.

"I suppose you believe every word he writes or says, do you not?" she said, contemptuously, handing the letter back to the girl.

"Yes—I do."

"Then there is nothing for me to say." Mrs. Sutton shrugged her shoulders and sat down again.

"Oh! Aunt Marian, don't say that; I really want your advice; will you not give it to me, dear?"

"My advice would be quite thrown away upon you while you are in such a childish state of blind faith in a man. What would be the use of my telling you how you ought to act about John Wilmot when we think so differently about him?"

"I thought you liked him very much, Aunt Marian; and—I don't very much more than like him now."

"Don't you really? My dear child, do you really think I had not discovered that little fact long ago? But what is the use of it while you believe in him to the extent you do? I like him certainly, but I estimate him properly, which you do not."

"No one can more thoroughly appreciate John Wilmot than I do," Ellen said, seriously.

"There is such a thing as over-appreciation: now, of course, I cannot say whether he has blinded you, or whether you are blinding yourself; but this I must say, you delude yourself about him if you think that much more than his vanity will be hurt when he finds out that your love has lapsed into only liking. Young men say a good deal more than they mean to many people."

"I cannot believe that John Wilmot does that—he is too honorable."

"Of course he is," Mrs. Sutton said, sneeringly; "too honorable to actually proffer vows of love to more than one, because that might be actionable; and your unsophisticated young farmer is wise enough to steer clear of damages, but not too honorable to seek to make more than one in love with him, and not too honest to be mortified when he fails in doing so."

"But, Aunt Marian, he never has been a flirt; there was not a girl in our part, down there, who would not have been glad to get his attentions if she could."

"He told you so, I suppose? Poor silly child! From his own report you are of course justified in pronouncing him to be a most honorable moralist. The 'girls down there.' I can understand why temptation did not come to him in their guise."

"Don't make me doubt him."

"Why not? Your are anxious to break with him; you don't wish to break his heart; and at the same time you cling with absurd tenacity to the belief that your breaking with him will make him very miserable: this is inconsistent."

"I don't like to think him dishonest because I am weak," Ellen said, dejectedly.

"Dishonest!" that is a harsh term to apply to that amiable 'humbug,' which men bring to bear upon women whenever they find it answers. John Wilmot will console himself very quickly. Don't you doubt that, Ellie."

"I shall be very glad if he does console himself. I do not wish to doubt his doing so," Ellen said, with a slight trembling in her tone.

"No, you will not be any thing of the kind, my dear," Mrs. Sutton said, with an affectation of being very tolerant to the weakness she was detecting; "you will not be glad if he does console himself. I am a woman, and though I have not had to bear anything of the sort myself, I know that you will be mortified; but you will be less mortified if you hear reason beforehand, than if you go on in blind faith believing all he suggests to you."

"Then what do you think I had better do?" Ellen asked, dejectedly.

"Do—oh! let me see; why write and tell him you have got his letter and will be happy to see him; be courteous, of course; but when he comes tell him what you want to tell him—you know best what that is."

"Aunt Marian! he will think so badly of me."

"For what?"

"For not going on with it and marrying him."

"Of course he will think badly of you for not going on with it; men always do think badly of women who do not 'go on with it,' as long as it is the men's pleasure it should go on."

"It will break his heart I believe," Ellen said, quickly. "You don't know about it all, Aunt Marian—you can't judge."

"Come here," was Mrs. Sutton's sole reply; and Ellen went over and knelt down by the side of the couch.

"Now look here," the elder lady went on, patting the younger one on the shoulder as she spoke; "what object can I have in speaking save to spare your feelings in this matter? tell me, do you think I can have any other?"

"None whatever, Aunt Marian."

"Well then, listen, and don't be a little goose. You hardly like to say it, but you think that John Wilmot is devoted to you, and you alone; that he could not care for another woman's love; and that no other woman can win his; that is what you think, plainly worded."

Ellen was silent.

"You need not speak," Mrs. Sutton went on, after a pause of a few moments; "you need not tell me whether I am wrong or right. I know without your telling me. Now I am not vain enough to fancy that John Wilmot is in love with me; but I tell you this, he has tried to make me in love with him."

"In love with him!—you!" poor Ellen stammered.

Mrs. Sutton nodded.

"With you—a married woman?"

"Not criminally so," Mrs. Sutton laughed lightly. "Your virtuously brought up birdie would shrink horror-stricken from that; but he is what men of his stamp call 'taken with me' to the degree of wishing to make me feel a rather stronger than mere friendly interest in him."

"I can't believe he means it in the way you think he does, Aunt Marian," Ellen stammered.

"Naturally; it is hard for you to believe that it is any thing more than a vicarious tribute to you," Mrs. Sutton said, laughing. "I am so likely to deceive myself about anything of the sort; the liking of such a young man as John Wilmot would be such a dazzlingly flattering thing to me! My dear child, do not pin your faith on any man's constancy, or you will find yourself so egregiously mistaken."

"Where is safety, then?" Ellen sighed.

"Where! in good settlements and the marriage service, certainly not in the selfish exactions of young men who would have girls waste their best days in waiting on the forlorn hope of marrying by-and-by. However, you must please yourself; only, for your own sake, don't cultivate the romantic notion that any man will break his heart about you. Now you had better leave me to dress; leave your note till after dinner."

Ellen did as she was bidden; and after dinner it was too late, Mrs. Sutton said, "to send a servant out with it." So John Wilmot did not get the answer he had asked for until the following day. It was a very slight and unsatisfactory answer when he did get it. It was even cooler than the last one to him which has been read in these pages:

"DEAR JOHN: I could not manage to write last night when I came home, and I had to dress for dinner. I shall be at home after luncheon to-day if you like to come."

"In great haste, yours truly,

"ELLEN."

He stood looking at the letter for some few moments after he had finished reading it, with his face burning and his heart beating. He had waited for it so anxiously, and now it had come, and it was so cruel. She could not "write to him because she had to dress for dinner;" and she should be at home after luncheon "if he liked to come." The poor young fellow ground his teeth together as the truth came home to him that he should go to very little purpose.

He had not staid at a hotel all this time, but had gone into lodgings in one of a row of houses that stands in that new part of Kensington called "Albertopolis." They were neat, clean, new rooms that he occupied over a furniture shop, but they were not cheerful. There was more cheerfulness in them than there was in his heart, as he re-read Ellen's letter in the vain hope of finding something kinder in it than had been apparent on his first reading. But he did not find that which he sought, for the simple reason that it was not there to be found.

The morning appeared a very long one to him. He had not the habit of taking sufficient interest in the topics of the day to enable him to be absorbed in a newspaper. London hours and London haunts and occupations were so many sealed books to him. Therefore he could not go out and while away the time until the moment for keeping his appointment with Ellen came. He longed with a pained yearning longing for the quiet of his own home, and the comfortable occupation his surroundings would have given him; for here he was quite alone—quite alone and very desolate.

It had been his hope for many years that Ellen would be his wife. Now, when there seemed to be a prospect of that hope being dashed to pieces, a vision of what his life down in the old familiar place that had been so dear to him, flashed before him and nearly broke his heart. His whole life to be darkened because of the idle folly and vanity that had prompted her mother to send Ellen out of her proper sphere. It was too cruel, too hard to be borne, and yet he must bear it.

How he had deceived himself about Ellen! This change that had been wrought in her toward himself had been her own work entirely; this he never doubted. He never for an instant, during the whole of these latter hours, suspected that the bright, sweet-looking lady, who was always so warm and kind to him, had any

share in it. But though he did not suspect pretty Mrs. Sutton of being his secret enemy, no other solution of the difficulty occurred to him. He could only feel that his love had been lightly esteemed and wronged, and sorrow that it was so; that was all, and the "all" was very hard to bear.

His inquiry for "Miss Bowden" was answered satisfactorily about two o'clock that day at her uncle's door. Miss Bowden was at home alone, and he could see her. Clogs seemed to fix themselves upon his feet as he followed the servant to that same room in which Mark Sutton had begged his niece to "keep honest and true in order that he might not curse the atmosphere of his house."

His name was announced, and he was in the room with the door closed behind him before he saw that the lady advancing so gladly toward him was not Ellen, but Mrs. Mark Sutton. Then he did not know whether to be sorry or glad that it was so, when that lady, giving him her cordial hand and genial smile the while, said:

"Not left town yet? How very good of you to stay to see us safely back!"

"Didn't Ellen tell you I was coming to-day?" he asked, bluntly; and Mrs. Sutton shook her untruthful little head and said:

"No, indeed! did she know it?"

"Why, of course she knew it, Mrs. Sutton," the poor boy broke out, vehemently; "of course she knew it. I wrote to her begging to see her, and she sent me a note this morning saying she would see me after luncheon; isn't she at home?"

"Ellen is a very extraordinary girl," Mrs. Sutton said solemnly, evading his direct question as to Ellen's being at home. "What I would have given to have inspired a true noble affection in the heart of a good man!"

"You!" he said, admiringly; for the lady before him was very touchingly appealing to the taste and heart of a man—she was so lovely and so gentle, and (at this moment) so tenderly sad. "You! why, Mrs. Sutton, you have done it; you must have done it."

Mrs. Sutton put her little white jeweled hand up to her forehead, and pretended to push back her nut-brown hair in utter weariness.

"I started in life thinking I must do so. I was young and happy, and had my dreams of joy for a time; but—well, it does not fall to every woman's lot to be really loved, I suppose; I have had an indulgent husband, who has left me to myself—very much to myself."

She sank her voice almost to a whisper as she said this; and John Wilmot pitied her profoundly as he saw her glance at her wedding-ring, and then turn her eyes away from it suddenly, as if the recollections it recalled were more than she could bear. Beauty, unappreciated, appeals strongly to the better feelings of most men who are not legally called upon to appreciate it; but worth and gentleness, such as John believed Mrs. Sutton to possess, appealed to him still more. He felt very sympathetic toward this fair fellow-sufferer, and he looked very sympathetic; and Mrs. Sutton read men's looks very readily.

"I suppose we all have our troubles," he muttered.

"Many people make their own troubles—I at least can not reproach myself with that," Marian replied, virtuously; "mine have been made for me by others; however, I don't see why I need bore you about myself."

"I should never be bored with anything you could say," he said, heartily.

"I do feel that we are very true real friends," the lady said, gratefully; "there is some comfort in that to both, I hope."

"Yes," John Wilmot said; but in his heart he felt conscious that there was very small comfort to him in Mrs. Sutton's friendship while Ellen staid away from him.

"I wish I had known you years ago," the lady went on, abstractedly, apparently forgetting that "years ago" John Wilmot was a very little boy, while she was a grown-up young lady; "if I had known you, I might have been a happier woman than I am."

His honest brow flushed to the roots of his hair as he took in the full force of the dangerously obvious allusions Marian had made. It staggered him; and yet "there could be no real harm in it, since good, sweet Mrs. Sutton had made it," he thought. Still, it was embarrassing. Married women who spoke the truth, and the whole truth, with respect to their domestic happiness or misery, had not come within his limited experience before. He wished more earnestly than ever that Ellen would come down; and Mrs. Sutton read his wishes, and took a faint pleasure in thwarting them.

"Girls are so weak and foolish," she went on, as if his visit there was made solely for the purpose of discussing the subject; "the exercise of a little moral courage would often save them a life of wretchedness—would it not?"

"Yes," he replied, not knowing at all what she was driving at.

"We get engaged," she said, softly and sadly, "and then, no matter whether or not we discover that we are not loved, or that we do not love, we think we must go on with it. If I could live my life over again, how differently I would act! if I had daughters, how cautious I would pray them to be!"

"But you wouldn't pray them to change their minds and break their promises for every idle new fancy they formed, would you?" he asked; and Mrs. Sutton tried not to blush guiltily as she replied:

"No; but I would not presume to decide as to whether any new fancy they formed was an idle one or not. A woman's instincts tell us when she can love on and be loved on for all time; she should obey her instincts; no other woman's opinion can avail her; am I not reasonable?"

"Very reasonable; but why do you say this to me, Mrs. Sutton?" he asked.

"Because I do like and regard you so very warmly," she said, in an irrepressible burst of very neatly portrayed genuine feeling; "because I should really be very sorry to see you with an unloving wife."

"Then you think Ellen does not love me?" His voice shook; but she was very pitiless.

"Do I think she loves you?—can I or any one else think she loves you, as you want to be loved by her? She likes you as an old friend and neighbor, and as the first man, probably, who discovered any charm whatever in her; but as for loving you as you deserve to be loved, Ellen Bowden is not capable of doing it."

"Why, I thought you liked her, Mrs. Sutton," he said, quickly. Mrs. Sutton might be wounding to heal; it was quite possible that she was being kind as well as brave; but this was certain, that she was "wounding" very deeply.

"So I do like her; she is a great, unformed country girl, not gifted with the grace to value the incomprehensible love you lavish upon her; but as for liking her as a wife for you, to tell you the simple truth, I do not."

"I don't suppose I shall ever get her to be my wife," he said, dejectedly; and then Mrs. Sutton held out her hand to him, and he had to get up and go over and take it.

"I will forgive you this folly," she was saying, and withdrawing her hand from his at the same moment, when the door opened, and Ellen Bowden came quickly into the room. She stopped at once, looked from one to the other with a mortified, suspicious look for one moment, and then said:

"Good-morning, Mr. Wilmot; a thousand pardons, Aunt Marian; but Madame Hortense is here, and she asked me to give you this." The girl threw a sealed letter down on the table as she spoke, then turned away and left the room in silence.

"Is she mad?" John Wilmot asked, angrily; and Mrs. Sutton shrugged her shoulders, and opened the note.

"Poor girl! she has been madly extravagant," Marian said, with a sigh, when she had finished the note. "I don't know what you would say if you saw this bill." The bill was her own, and for fifty pounds, but she did not intend that John Wilmot should see it. "How angry her mother will be," she went on; "and I can't pay it: poor child!"

"How much is it?" he asked.

"Fifty pounds."

"I will pay it, if you will promise never to let her know that I have done so," he said, with an agitated voice. "Let me; I am not quite such a poor country farmer as you think me; let me do that for her, at least."

"If she ever finds it out she will never forgive me," Mrs. Sutton said; "but I cannot allow you—I will not allow you. What am I to do?"

"Do take it," he pleaded; "I will go back at once to my lodgings and draw a check, and I won't try to see her again. Thank you for all your kindness—bless you for it!"

Mrs. Sutton shook him heartily by the hand, begged him to write to her, and a minute afterward he was out in the street without having had that explanation with Ellen for which he had been pining. That night Madame Hortense was pacified, and Ellen was told by her aunt that "John Wilmot had accepted the situation her (Ellen's) coolness compelled him to take very quietly."

It was not a pleasant evening that which the aunt and niece spent alone together. Mark Sutton was absent on business with Edgar; Ellen had been stung, and made to smart very severely by Mrs. Sutton on the subject of John Wilmot's facility for falling in love with other people the day before, and this day she had, as she believed received ocular demonstration. She did not know (and Marian would not tell her) that Marian's speech, "I will forgive you this folly," had reference to something else, not to his "folly" of having taken Mrs. Sutton's hand in his. "Mr. Wilmot entirely forgot that he came to see me, Aunt Marian," Ellen said, trying to laugh about her discomfiture, and Mrs. Sutton replied:

"You will be less scrupulous than you were last night about doing what you want to do; he is a very weak young man."

"He may be that," Ellen thought, "but what must Aunt Marian be to encourage him?" However, she did not word her thought. Still, it was not a pleasant evening, not one bit more pleasant than the one John Wilmot spent alone, endeavoring "to realize it all."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN TROUBLED WATERS.

SMALL AS MR. AND MRS. LIONEL TALBOT'S establishment was, it took them some time to get it into perfect working order. Bright and active-minded as Blanche was, domestic arrangements outran her at times and became unmanageable. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that Lionel's dinner would have been more punctually served very often, if his wife had not entirely forgotten to order it until very late in the day. That dream of "working on steadily in happy unbroken quiet," in which she had indulged before her marriage, was quickly dispelled. The knowledge that Lionel was at work in a room near to her, and that if she pleased she could at any moment go in and be welcomed warmly and lovingly by him, was disturbing, though gratifying. It led her thoughts off from the people whom she was portraying, and steeped her in a dreamy, happy idleness that was not conducive to the successful doing of the real "work" there is in fiction writing.

Each night Mrs. Lionel Talbot made excellent resolutions, as to the way in which she would on the following day abstain from making unnecessary errands to her husband's studio, and each day she broke them. In absolute unconsciousness of the dark error into which Trixy had fallen Blanche deepened that error at times by her manner. Out of the great desire she had to thoroughly understand her husband, in order that she might save him every sort of unnecessary annoyance, grew a habit of talking quietly about him to Frank, who had known her husband familiarly so long. This habit became one of sore annoyance to Beatrix; not that she wronged either Blanche or Frank to any greater extent than this—namely, that she believed Blanche to be mentally more congenial to Frank than she herself was.

This mind-jealousy is harder for some women to bear than a heart-jealousy would be. No vulgar dread of coarse unfaithfulness can implant such a sting in the breast as does the dread that the man who is loved may find a higher pleasure with another than with the woman who loves him. The coarse infidelity may be despised; the contempt it shows may be met with contempt; but the loftier feeling that is gratified by the

"Before, when I had nothing to look back upon, and nothing to look forward to, when I knew that the evening would bring me no relaxation, I could work on without wearying; and now that I am so happy, and that I know the close of the day will bring me your companionship, Lal, I do little besides draw faces on my blotting-paper and yawn, when I am not rushing here to bore you," she would say to Lionel, by way of apology for sauntering in to see "how he was getting on." Then Lionel would put down his pallet and brush, and waste a good deal of time in reassuring her as to the impossibility of her ever "boring him," and so Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Talbot got into the habit of leading what some practical people without half their power of work termed "an idle, desultory life."

At last, when they had been married about three months their privacy was broken in upon in a way that at first promised to make them very happy, and that afterward made them very miserable. Beatrix wrote to her brother from Mrs. Lyon's house at Haldon, and asked him "would he be surprised and sorry, or glad, as she herself was, when she told him that Frank Bathurst had asked her to marry him?" Then she went on to ask if "Blanche would have her up with them for a little time? and if it was not all very delightful?"

It was very "delightful" to them all, especially when Trixy came up-to-day with them, and Frank wrote to Lionel in the best brotherly vein. Mr. Bathurst's happy knack of ignoring that which is best ignored, was too well known to Blanche for her to have a single doubt as to the way in which he would meet her now that he was engaged to Beatrix. But it was not known to Beatrix, or if it was, she chose to forget it on the occasion of Frank's first coming out to see and be hearty to her brother and his wife. Beatrix was of that order of women who love wholly and devotedly, and (if they may) engrossingly. Her affection for Mr. Bathurst was the one feeling of her life. It was very terrible to her to know that, four months ago, he had been quite as ready to marry some one else as he now was to marry her. It was even more terrible to her to know that this "some one else" was her brother's wife, likely, according to all the laws of chance, to have frequent intercourse with them. She was fond of Blanche, and she thoroughly believed in the purity and probity of her predecessor in Frank's heart. But not the less did she chafe under the knowledge that Blanche had precluded her, and that Frank would neither be forgetful nor ashamed of the fact.

Down in the solitary lanes and wooded glades of Haldon, Trixy had, during the last three months' almost forgotten that Frank had not always been devoted to her as he now was. But the recollection returned in a little sharp spasm, when she saw his face kindling with joy at the sight of the cousin who would always be dear to him, though she would not be his love. In this Beatrix, who adored him, was more unjust than Blanche, who did not adore him; she overestimated his regard for her sister-in-law, and the extent of Blanche's influence over him. As both Mr. Bathurst and Blanche were unconscious of this, the elements of mischief and unhappiness were in their midst to a dangerous degree.

There was another element of unhappiness in their midst, too, that would soon, Blanche feared, make itself manifest in most cruel form—and this was poverty. They had married on hope and love, and the possible proceeds of their respective arts. Now, though love was still as active a power as ever, hope was fading a little in the woman's heart. So her work grew weaker she fancied, because of that undefined disturbance in her mind which money difficulties are sure to create. Still she kept her sorrows of doubt and fear to herself for awhile, lest Lionel's artist power might lessen under what she felt to be ignoble pressure.

When the depressing conviction first struck her that she did not write with the physical energy and vigor of former days, and that consequently the mental energy and vigor which had marked her works was wanting, Beatrix had been with them a week. So in order that there might be no cloud over the glorious sun which was shining on the bride elect, Blanche suffered with smiles on her face, and seemed altogether gayer than Trixy had ever seen her (Blanche) before. At first this pleased the sister, who was willing to take it as a tribute to the happiness-conferring power of her brother; but after a while the effort which Blanche could not entirely conceal struck Trixy, and made her watchful for a reason for all not being so fair as it seemed.

She searched about and dwelt upon the subject until she found one that seemed all-sufficient to her. Blanche was not quite happy, that was evident; and yet she was so lately married, and Lionel loved her so well! Then the jealous suspicion arose, that Blanche could not be quite happy in the presence of Frank Bathurst, or of the woman he was going to marry. It made Miss Talbot very miserable, and she dared not lighten her misery by wording it.

In absolute unconsciousness of the dark error into which Trixy had fallen Blanche deepened that error at times by her manner. Out of the great desire she had to thoroughly understand her husband, in order that she might save him every sort of unnecessary annoyance, grew a habit of talking quietly about him to Frank, who had known her husband familiarly so long. This habit became one of sore annoyance to Beatrix; not that she wronged either Blanche or Frank to any greater extent than this—namely, that she believed Blanche to be mentally more congenial to Frank than she herself was.

This mind-jealousy is harder for some women to bear than a heart-jealousy would be. No vulgar dread of coarse unfaithfulness can implant such a sting in the breast as does the dread that the man who is loved may find a higher pleasure with another than with the woman who loves him. The coarse infidelity may be despised; the contempt it shows may be met with contempt; but the loftier feeling that is gratified by the

Loftier sympathy cannot be despised and treated with contempt. Again, through all her dread of its being so, Beatrix had a strong feeling that it ought not to be so, that there was no good and sufficient reason why Frank should not to the full feel the "higher pleasure" in conversing with her that he had in conversing with Mrs. Lionel. When she came to think about it thoroughly, she could but discover herself to be possessed of certain mental qualities that were superior to those possessed by Blanche. In reality, the things she thought about most of the topics that were broached, were more logical, and more sensible, and more capable of being defended by sound argument than Blanche's thoughts were. But Blanche had the knack of so wording hers without hesitation, that they made their mark. Consequently, Blanche always seemed to send forth her darts with a brilliant aim, because she cared little which special ring of the target that was the topic she struck; while Trixy was bent on hitting the gold, and the gold only.

But Mr. Bathurst never seemed to appreciate this wonderful grace (for a woman) of thinking before she spoke which Trixy had. His attention rather seemed to be riveted when Blanche's brilliant darts came flashing in. Then he would look up with an admiring earnestness, with a listening watchfulness that made Trixy sick with the sickness of a jealous dread that she scorned herself for feeling, and still could not kill. Still, through it all they were as friendly as sisters-in-law usually are; so Blanche had no idea of the vitality there was in the sort of bitterness which had been implanted long ago in Beatrix.

There had been a great question in the family as to whose house Beatrix should be married from. Mrs. Mark Sutton had come forward magnificently, with an offer of providing the breakfast, and of Mark to give the bride away. But this offer Beatrix had refused. "Her brother Edgar had been her first friend in her own family," she said; "he should give her away if he would, and she would stay with Lionel till she was married."

That time "till she was married" was a very sorry one with the Talbots. All Blanche's high spirit and good resolves were not sufficient to keep the little bark in which she had shipped afloat. Lionel, it was evident, had not the money-getting power; she did not wish him to have it at the sacrifice of one higher thought or feeling. But the want of it would soon leave them in a sore straight, and the wreck would be seen by all. "If we could only hold on till May his picture would be seen and bought, and then"— But it was hard, nay, almost impossible, to "hold on till May" on the small proceeds of a few magazine articles, which she would not even have him know she had written, because they were not worthy of the woman he had married.

It was a sorry time. She had to bear much from unconscious ones, "who wondered she did not sell her books to So-and-so and get the same prices Mrs. So-and-so did for hers." Mrs. Mark Sutton came out as a tremendously strong private critic on the subject of her sister-in-law's books. "I assure you, I hear it remarked in society that, until you depict higher types, your books will be failures," she would say, with a great air of being grieved at the truth of her own remark. "People are sick of sensation; they do not mind it in real life, but they will not have it in fiction; what they want now are strong characters, and strong incidents strongly painted; not sensation."

"It is so easy to draw the line between 'strong incidents strongly painted,' and sensation, is it not?" Blanche said, quietly; and Mrs. Sutton shrugged her shoulders, and said:

"Not easy, but quite worth trying to do, I should imagine; I'm not speaking of you, of course, Blanche, but really the twaddle one has to get through in most of the books one gets from the library must be very easy writing. I wonder you do not attempt something like a plot."

"Plot is not my strong point," Blanche tried to speak good-temperedly.

"It is not? I thought you had tried in one or two books and not managed it quite properly; what do you consider your strong point?"

"My weak one, since even you haven't found it out," Blanche retorted, angrily; "I fancied I knew something of character."

"Ah!" Marian said, amiably—it always made her amiable when she had succeeded in irritating Blanche, "you want to see a great deal of society before you attempt to depict it."

"I spoke of character, not society; perhaps you don't know that there is very little of the first in the last."

"Your point of view at the Grange, for instance, was a bad one, you know," Mrs. Sutton went on, kindly; "you never get such a clear idea of anything when you look up to it, as when you look down upon it."

"I got a very clear idea as to all the guests at the Grange," Blanche said, smiling; "perhaps you will accept that statement as strengthening to your argument."

"Good-by, Lal," Mrs. Sutton said, shortly after this, going into her brother's studio. "I ventured to make a remark to Blanche about her books, and I supposed it annoyed her, for she tells me she always looked down upon me when she met me at the Grange."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"WHO COULD IT BE?"

It was a long time before Edgar Talbot could make up his mind to go and see his brother and Blanche together as man and wife. Her turning from him in his trouble to Lionel had embittered Edgar Talbot very much; and as he was fully aware of the force of his bitterness and of its injustice, he would not go near them while he could stay away. But when Beatrix came up on a visit to the bride just before she became a bride herself, there was just so much courteous coer-

cion used in the matter of inviting him as compelled him to go to the inaccessible suburb and see them.

Out of genuine good feeling for the man who might still be supposed to have rather a sore feeling about her, Blanche decided that Edgar should not find them alone. "Let us ask the Suttons and their Mr. Eldale and Miss Bowden to dinner to meet him, Lal," she said, suggestively; and when Lionel, who would have acquiesced in any proposition of hers, even if it had embraced inviting the moon and the stars to a family repast, when he nodded assent she added:

"Not to a swell turbot and Palestine soup and chablis and oyster dinner, you know, Lal; but I feel that a dinner is the only thing that will bring Edgar here comfortably."

So the invitations were sent and accepted, and then Blanche found that a dinner in theory is easier than a dinner in practice if the establishment be small. It was smooth sailing enough so long as she was saying what she would have, and how she would have it. But their one domestic was that most unmanageable of all animals, an obtuse human being, who would act on her own instincts, which were invariably bad. Accordingly Blanche's hopes of "things going off well" were much dashed during the morning.

"The table will look sweet—till the eatables come upon it," Blanche said to Trixy, "for Lal, in his character as artist, has picked up a quantity of quaint old German and Venetian glass; that with two or three flowers."

"But where will you get the flowers and the wine for the old German and Venetian glasses?" Trixy asked, laughingly. "They won't walk in to see you by dinner-time, Blanche, and you haven't ordered them, have you?"

"No, I have not" Blanche said, candidly; "but ale and sherry won't taste the worse for being drunk out of antique goblets that are meant for hock and Champagne; as for the flowers—well, they are a difficulty, since I can't toil up to Covent Garden Market for them."

"I am afraid we must give up the flowers," Trixy said, pensively. "It is a pity, because, if other things fail, a rose is nice to look at."

"I haven't risked a failure," Blanche said; "soles can't be very badly fried, can they? unless they are spoiled by malice intent; and mutton can't be burnt in boiling; and the weakest-minded person can tell how long chickens ought to be roasting; as for the sweets, I shall tackle that part of the entertainment myself."

"It really is not worth the trouble," Beatrix said, languidly.

"No—you swell in anticipation; I quite agree with you as far as you're concerned," Blanche said laughing; "but it's worth all the trouble I shall have, and a great deal more, if it brings Edgar among us comfortably again. Oh, if I had some flowers, what a sweet nook of a drawing-room I would make of this part of the room beyond the alcove! even you should not sigh for your palatial chambers, young lady."

"What shall you do, as we have no flowers?" Trixy asked.

"Oh, make the best of it; easy-chairs (we would have them when we were furnishing), and nuts, and sherry, and the strongest coffee, and the best intentions; when these pall upon our guests they may go home."

"You do make the best of things," Trixy said, in a sudden burst of good feeling. "Poor dear Blanche! ought you not to be writing?"

"Yes; I always ought to be writing—and I can't always be doing it. Now, Trixy, the present need is always the greatest to my mind; it's four, and they are coming at seven. Before that hour a complete transformation must be effected in my house and in my person; and Lal must not be disturbed through it at all; so for two hours I must be a house-maid."

As she spoke she put on a long brown holland apron with sleeves in it, and armed herself with a duster and a brush, and under the dextrous management of her supple hands the little room and the alcove beyond it soon assumed a different air.

"I always think it prettier to dine near to a window instead of in the middle of the room," she said, pulling the table to where the one who would sit at the head would be shrouded in the curtains; "and in our case beauty and expediency unite: it gives more space for the free movements of the excellent man who sold me my potatoes this morning and will serve them to us tonight."

Then she paused, out of breath a little with her exertions, and wished once more for a few flowers, to brighten that air of barrenness which might make Edgar think that there had been more haste than judgment in their marriage.

It was therefore no trifling pleasure to her, when she came down dressed at last to her little sitting-room, to find one of the chairs occupied by a trayful of choice flowers. As she bent over them, inhaling the sweetness of their blooms, the feeling of intense delight in having them at all overcame all curiosity as to how they came there. There would be nothing wanting so far as the pride of the eye was concerned, she felt, in a room adorned by these flowers. They would redeem it from all that plainness and somberness which she had been feeling rather acutely this day. Then she remembered that she had no specimen-glasses, no three-tier vases—nothing which modern art has designed for the fitting holding of flowers. So she set to work at once to improvise something. Taking a soup-plate for the foundation, placing a lamp-stand in the middle of it, and putting a tall, old-fashioned ale-glass on the top of the lamp-stand, she achieved a very fair result. When the whole structure was decked with carefully-disposed flowers and a great deal of foliage, the "fair result" became a glorious one.

She forgot how time was passing as she hung over her flowers, they were in such luxuriant masses, though it was mid-winter. She grouped them everywhere; it was the first pleasure of the kind she had

had since she left the riverside hotel which had been the scene of her honeymoon happiness. An hour slipped away as she grouped crimson camellias with thin, dark, glossy green leaves, in small old china bowls on brackets against the white watered paper. The plain, rather narrow, white marble mantle-piece supported the broad, gorgeously-beautiful leaves of a rare foliage plant so excellently well that Blanche's love of the lovely kept her idly gazing far too long. Then suddenly a knock at the door startled her, and she stood still surrounded with unarranged flowers, waiting the advent of her guests. Feeling guiltily that she had neglected the prose of life for the poetry—knowing that she ought to have gone to the kitchen to see how matters progressed there—that she ought to have laid out Lionel's evening-dress for him—that, above all things, she ought not to have been surprised in this state of confusion by Mr. and Mrs. Sutton, now the hour she had named for dinner had fully come.

"Some good genius, knowing my love of flowers, has sent me a whole green-house, and I have been fascinated into forgetting how much room they take up," she said, apologetically, as Mrs. Sutton came into the room.

Perfect as Mrs. Sutton's tact was, she never would exert it for the purpose of making things pleasanter to Blanche. So now, when she saw that Blanche was embarrassed by being thus taken unawares, Marian added to that embarrassment to the best of her ability. She smiled a very faint smile as she gave her hand to Blanche, and muttered something relative to "fearing they had mistaken the hour."

"No, you have not," Blanche said, gathering up all her flowers as she spoke. "Dear me! where can Trixy and Lionel be? Do sit down in here" (she indicated the alcove), "and I will look for them; this" (laughing) "is our only drawing-room."

Mrs. Sutton glanced at the alcove, and then walked into it with a little sigh of resignation, and a slight movement of her shoulders which was not lost upon Blanche. Nor was it lost upon Miss Bowden, who deemed it the correct thing to follow in her aunt's footsteps and be supercilious too.

"Let me help you," Mark Sutton said, kindly taking the tray from Blanche; "where shall I put them?"

"You must not trouble yourself, Mr. Sutton." "It's no trouble to help you, and you shouldn't treat us like strangers," Mark said; and then Mrs. Sutton made a remark to the effect that "really they could not complain of being treated too ceremoniously."

Blanche went up stairs considerably mortified at the untoward commencement of her well-meant entertainment. "I'm sure I did not mean to be pretentious or negligent," she thought, "and I seem to have been both." Then she knocked rather humbly at Trixy's door, and asked that young lady if she were "ready to go down and help to amuse Marian?"

"Are they come?"

"Yes—and caught me in confusion—arranging, oh! such lovely flowers."

"Where did you get them?" Beatrix asked, briskly coming to the door.

"I don't know at all. They came, sent by my kind star, I suppose; they're superb!"

"And you don't know who sent them?" Beatrix repeated, her pale face flushing a little; "that is singular."

Something in Trixy's tone made Blanche blush too as an idea smote her. Then she said, boldly:

"I have not thought so before, but now I think it must be Frank; do you know, Trixy?"

"O dear, no!" Trixy replied; "I know nothing about it. Yes, I am ready; I'll go down."

When she said that, Blanche went on to Lionel's room, feeling sadly that through no fault of hers Lionel's sisters were both antagonistic.

She got ample compensation from Lionel for all this worry and wear and tear of spirit. "My darling, don't distress yourself about what you can't help," he said, affectionately. "What if they did find you arranging your flowers, and if they have to wait half an hour for dinner? Because I can't give you an establishment, they don't expect my wife to be a slave. Come on; come down."

"In your velveteen, Lionel?"

"Why not?" he asked, laughing, "You say it's becoming and artistic, and I know it's comfortable. A dress-coat means so much more than we are going to give them that you must let me wear this."

So she said nothing more against it; and when they went down Mrs. Sutton said to Mr. Eldale, who arrived just at the moment, that she was sorry to see her brother had grown so negligent about conventionalities; "he used not to be—it comes from his having married a thorough Bohemian."

The whole party had assembled now, and still there were no signs of the approach of dinner. Blanche's heart began to go down; it seemed impossible to avert silence, and Edgar watched her closely. So, partly to create a diversion, and partly in pursuance of her plan of being perfectly open with regard to her relations with Frank Bathurst, she asked "if she had to thank him for the lovely flowers?" adding quickly, that "it was so kind and thoughtful to send them—just what she expected of him."

"Then I'm sorry to disappoint your expectations, Blanche," he said. "I never thought of them; I know nothing about them."

"Who could it be?" she asked, wonderfully looking round the little circle; and Mrs. Sutton replied:

"Some other thoughtful and considerate friend. How nice it must be for you, Lionel, to have a wife who is so warmly regarded! What lovely flowers you get!"

"Perhaps it's some hero-worshiper," Mr. Eldale suggested—"some one who has read your last work, and dare only to lay floral offerings at your shrine."

"Accept Mr. Eldale's reading of the mystery, Blanche. You will find compensation in it for your last bad review. It must be delightful to be an authoress."

Marian spoke very slowly, but the dulcet tones did

not conceal the latent sneer; and as Blanche crimsoned under the blow, Edgar Talbot said, quietly:

"Do not you be fired by the spirit of emulation, Marian. If you wrote from experience you would give us such hideous pictures of society that we should not like to show it in again."

"Mrs. Sutton would act the part of censor, then," Mr. Eldale said. He was the only one who was outside the pale of relationship. It was not pleasant to him, therefore, to hear the hard fraternal truths which were being told.

"Marian, whipping the faults and follies of the age, would be an improving spectacle," Edgar said, laughing.

"A panoramic view is not the best, I allow. One who had mingled in those follies would whip them better than Mrs. Sutton," Mr. Eldale said, eagerly. "Do you remember what the stinging little poet wrote:

"I know the thing that's most uncommon
(Envy, be silent, and attend);
I know a reasonable woman,
Handsome and witty, yet a friend."

"Has she no faults, then?" Envy says, Sir.
"Yes, she has one, I must aver:
When all the world conspires to praise her,
The woman's deaf, and does not hear."

"Your long quotation goes to prove that Pope had not Marian in his mind's eye when he wrote those lines," Edgar said; and Marian put in:

"If I were not so stupid I would say something neat about Edgar being so epigrammatic; but he might take me to task as to the exact meaning of the word, and that would be fatal."

Just as she said that the tardy dinner came, and poor Blanche partially recovered her spirits as she sat down to the table that seemed to be lacking in nothing by reason of the multitude of flowers that were upon it.

To narrate each little drawback to the perfect serving and ordering of this well-intentioned banquet would be to descend to dreary, dull details. Accordingly, though dreary dull details make up a large portion of the sum of life for most, they shall not be dwelt upon here. It is enough to say that the dinner was not what it would have been had a French *chef* cooked and an attentive footman served it, and that the shadow of each shortcoming was mirrored in Blanche's face.

"The game has not been worth the candle," she thought, as she led the way up stairs to her own writing-room after dinner. "Marian despises it all; Edgar is cool to me and to his brother; and Trixy is put out by the flower mystery. Why should she suspect Frank of practicing such a small deception, and why should she mind it if he had sent them to me? people are very funny." As she thought this she tried to arrange three rather dissatisfied women in a small room containing one easy-chair, and the attempt was a failure.

"Thanks; it's hardly worth while my sitting down," Marian said, with ill-concealed rudeness; "we are so far from home that we must start soon."

"Don't you dislike having nothing but a blank wall to look at when you're writing, Mrs. Talbot?" Ellen Bowden asked, patronizingly.

"I don't think the view of the blank wall the loveliest in the world," Blanche said, good temperedly, "but when I am writing I have no time to look up."

"You haven't much time for anything but writing, have you?" Mrs. Sutton asked, turning her head round over her shoulder to look at Blanche, with an air of constraining herself to take an interest in her hostess that was scarcely concealed.

"No; very little time for anything but writing."

"Rather a bad thing for a married woman," Mrs. Sutton said, considerately; "if you can't look after things yourself, with Lionel's means, you will soon find yourself in an awkward position."

"I hope not," replied Blanche; "I hope not, for his sake much more than my own;" and she did not add that she was wearing out her youth and strength in trying to add to his means, as it was her pleasure and duty to do.

"Well," Marian said, "I have pointed out one element of success that is lacking in your books; if you take my advice you would be read by people who would not have your novels in their houses now. I often recommend your works—but it's no use."

Blanche bowed her head slightly in acknowledgment of the—insolence, for it was nothing less. How dared this woman come to her house and insult her in this way? It had indeed come to a strange pass when Blanche had to stand by and listen to Mrs. Mark Sutton's statement of how she had recommended Blanche's books, and heard them rejected, in silence.

Things were a little better when they all went back to the alcove that was her drawing-room; for by that time the men had warmed toward each other—and there was only about a quarter of an hour longer of each other's society to be endured. Then at length Edgar spoke to her.

"I have been fortunate since I saw you, Blanche," he said; "my dream of regaining all that I have lost is over; but I do look forward to being regarded as something better than the black sheep of the family again."

"I am very glad to hear you have been fortunate again—I won't call it being 'fortunate' only—to hear you have been better rewarded for your exertions."

"Can you guess what has been the first extravagance I have indulged in since my return of luck?"

She shook her head, and he turned round and took up a group of the rarest flowers which had been sent to her.

"I am glad you liked them," he said. "I shall come again, Blanche. I am working now to add to the happiness of others. I can face Lionel and you better than before."

CHAPTER XXXII.

TRIXY'S SECRET.

The description of one bridal has already been given in these pages; it would be scarcely fair to inflict another upon the reader.

It is enough to say that Frank Bathurst and Beatrix were married—married under very different circumstances to those which attended the ceremony that made Lionel and Blanche man and wife; married, in spite of all Trixy's doubts and fears as to his love for her not being as powerful, perfect, and pure as hers was for him; married, and so, according to the ordinary routine of fiction, done for.

Their tour was a triumphant progress: a very different sort of affair to that quiet one which inaugurated wedded life for Mr. and Mrs. Lionel. Mr. Bathurst bore his wife to Rome, when she was made happy by the sight of the studio he had worked in with Lionel; when that close friendship with her brother had been formed which had ended in this—this happiness which she still regarded tremblingly, in terrible fear that something would come to mar it.

They were home again, back at beautiful, quiet Halton, before the fear was realized. It was late in April, and in May they were going up to town for the season. The little cloud came from an unsuspected quarter, from Mrs. Mark Sutton.

They were such early risers, and the post-office was so far from them, that they had generally finished breakfast and were walking about on the lawn between the house and the lake before the bag was brought in. At any rate they were doing so this day; and when Frank had taken out the contents of the bag they went down and sat under the tree under which Lionel and Blanche had lounged with them long ago, and sorted their several epistles, and began to read.

"A tolerable budget from Marian," Mr. Bathurst said, tossing a thick letter into his wife's lap; "she is sending you all the fashions, I should think."

"How dull she must be to send me such a long letter!" Beatrix said, laughing. Then she opened the envelope and began to read.

It was a long letter, a very long letter, and it need not be transcribed here in full. It commenced by Marian's telling Beatrix how grieved she was to pain any human being, much more "one whom she had always regarded as a sister." Mrs. Sutton was not above the vulgarity of dashing words on which she desired particular stress to be laid. Those that stand in inverted commas were triply underlined. Then she went on to say that Beatrix might have heard of old Mr. Talbot's will; she (Marian) would quote one sentence from it:

"To Marian Talbot, his eldest daughter, one thousand pounds and her mother's jewels."

The jewels were not worth much, excepting as articles of curiosity. They were too heavy in their barbaric massiveness to be agreeable to wear, but they were very curious. The bracelets, for instance, were some of them perfect little boxes. Marian had been amusing herself by looking them over and trying to find out secret springs in them lately, and she had succeeded, to her own sorrow (she begged Beatrix to remember always *very* much to her own sorrow), in lighting on such a secret as would be a spring of grief in the family.

Poor Trixy had read as far as this, when her husband finished his letters, and asked her "What on earth Marian could have found to spin such a yarn about?" "I don't know yet, Frank," she replied; "some 'secret' she says, but I have not come to it yet."

"I'll just stroll round to the stables," he said, rising up. "By the time I come back perhaps you will have come to it, dear." Then he walked away leisurely, and Trixy went on with her letter.

Presently her hands fell into her lap, and she threw her head up as if she wanted fresh air, and to face the worst. There was a hot flush on her brow and cheeks, and her eyes were flashing painfully. She had just read this paragraph:

"I am sure you will pity me for having been the one to find it, but my conscience will not allow me to conceal the truth from you now that I have discovered it. Whether I consent to conceal it from your husband will be a matter for after-consideration. A paper that I found behind a spring in one of mamma's old bracelets proves that you are not my father's daughter. He knew it, and left you nothing, as you know. You had better write to me on the subject and say what you mean to do."

What she meant to do! It was hard indeed to say what she meant to do—what there was left for her to do. Her first impulse was to tell this terrible thing to her husband, and leave him to direct her. Her next was to conceal it from him. Frank thought so very much of pure descent and no one would be wronged by the concealment, of the fact that she was basely born. Basely born! the mere utterance of the phrase to herself nearly crushed her to the earth. She could not tell Frank. She would write at once to Marian, and beg her for the sake of all good womanly feeling to keep this secret which could harm no one, and which, if made known to her (Trix's) husband, might estrange him from her. That was the rock on which she split; her horrible dread that anything might occur to estrange the man she worshiped from her. The feeling, good in itself, became of undue weight, and swayed her out of the right honest course.

She got up at last, pale enough now, and very miserable. A thousand doubts assailed her. She had been married as "Beatrix Talbot;" her marriage even might be invalid, since she had no right to the name. What if Frank should repudiate her for it! Men who had loved their wives far more passionately than her passionately-loved Frank had separated themselves from those wives for pride's sake, or ambition, or revenge. Frank, as very proud. He might feel about his children, should she be blessed with any, that the mother had come across and marred the breed. There was only one thing for her to do, and that was to throw herself upon Marian's mercy.

She shuddered as she thought this, for she knew what

Marian's tender mercies were likely to be very much needed. Still Marian could gain nothing by giving the secret forth, and she might gain something by keeping it. Then her spirit revolted at the notion of bribing any one, and she nearly decided upon taking the only safe path and telling her husband the sad truth concerning which she was only unfortunate, not blameable. But again the dread of losing the smallest particle of his esteem and love, or of his pride in her, set in, and she felt that she dared not tell him.

How coldly Nature mocks such a social misery as this on a fair spring day in a beautiful country! The trees decked out in their earliest, loveliest green; the lake, whose silvery shimmer was only broken by the slow, majestic progress of the swans across it; the white cloud-flecked blue sky, the cooing wood-pigeon in the distance—none of these things were less fair or sweet to her because she was basely born. Yet in the eyes of her kind, she would be a different being should the truth get known.

But it should not get known. She quickened her steps almost to a run as she thought this. She would write her letter to Marian at once, get it off her mind, and then try to occupy herself with something that should take her thoughts off the subject till luncheon, when she could meet Frank with an unruffled brow, with her plumage in such order as he loved to see; in fact, when she should be so perfectly gay and bright that he should forget to question her about that luckless letter of the morning.

She wondered if this thing would ever be other than a gnawing pain to her—if she should ever forget it, or come to think lightly of it, or cease to tremble when the possibility of its being made public occurred to her. Her mother had been very cruel to leave this heritage of woe to her child, this lasting shame, this wound for which there was no balm!—very cruel to work such a change in any woman by her evil deeds, as Trixy saw with surprise was wrought in herself as she came into her room and faced herself in the glass. She was looking so pale and haggard that she began to dread the look that would come upon her husband's face when he saw her. The tears would fill her eyes and break from them, and tears always left their mark upon her for hours.

Her hand was shaking and her heart was swelling when she sat down to write to Marian. She made her appeal very briefly, very strongly, very earnestly. Since no one could lose by the terrible truth being withheld, and she might lose fearfully by its being given out, she implored that it might be withheld. And as she wrote she grew easier in mind, for she deemed that such an appeal from woman to woman must tell.

The letter was soon written, and then she arranged her hair freshly, and reorganized some of those delicate details of dress which give a new look to a woman. Then she took up some work and went down to the library, where she generally sat with her husband before luncheon, and found him turning over the papers, and rather disgusted with her for having staid away from him so long.

"What have you been about, child?" he asked, as she came in. "I went back to look for you by the lake, to hear the contents of that wonderful letter, and you had fled."

"And what did you do then?" she said; "sat down and smoked, I believe."

"Well, I did smoke, and thought what a bore it was that my wife was not there to read the papers to me; what have you been about?"

"This."

She held up her hands, in which she held an ivory shuttle and a gold pin, and some fine cotton, to indicate that she was "tatting."

"What nonsense! what's the good of it?" he said contemptuously.

"It trims things," she said.

"I have had a letter from Lal to-day," Frank then said; "he is very hopeful about his picture; it's accepted, and well hung, and Blanche has induced him to put a swinging long price on it."

"That's silly of her; she should have been contented with a moderate price."

"I advised her to advise Lal to do it."

"Still I think it silly," Trixy repeated; "it is so essential to their well-being that his pictures should sell at some price that I think it silly to be exorbitant; his picture will be unsold at the end of the season."

"I tell you I advised her to urge him to do it," Frank said, quickly; "I shall take care that it does not remain unsold at the end of the season, for if no one else buys it I will."

"It's a pity you can't publish her books, too," Trixy said, quietly; "what sums she would receive, and how many editions you would force them into, and what a success she would secure in the columns of the daily press!"

"She will have a better success than anyone can make for her. Poor Blanche! I should like to see her on the top of the tree. Do you remember how Mrs. Sutton tried to crush her when we all dined there before we were married, by being fine and mighty? By the way, what does Marian say to you to-day?"

"Oh, Marian's letter would not interest you," Trixy replied, feeling dolefully the while what an agonizingly painful interest this letter would have for him.

"I beg your pardon; they do interest me intensely; they are perfect studies of conceit and selfishness. I look upon myself as defrauded of a very innocent amusement when you won't let me read Marian's letters."

"Now, Frank, if you say that, how can you expect I shall let you see my sister's letters?"

"My darling child, I always forget that you are sisters; and, now I think about it, it's hard to realize that the same blood flows in your veins; I offer no slight to you in laughing at Marian; besides, why should you make yourself responsible for other people's sins?"

"Why, indeed?" Trixy sighed, trying hard as she

spoke to seem very much absorbed in her tatting. Every one of the kindly sentences he had spoken had gone straight to her heart, cutting and lacerating it with the keen consciousness of the deception she was practising upon him. She almost made up her mind to tell him at once; but she hesitated; and then the luncheon-bell rang, and the opportunity was lost.

When luncheon was over she could not bear to mar the soft, smiling, quiet beauty of that spring afternoon by referring to a disagreeable topic; so she tried hard to put the thought of that letter away from her own mind even, and to thoroughly enjoy the glorious present, when Frank said to her:

"Shall we go for a ride, Trixy? There are two or three picturesque, little sequestered villages about here that I should like to show you; they are as lovely as anything I have seen in Switzerland; will you come?"

"I shall enjoy a ride; yes, Frank."

"It will do you good, too; you're looking pale."

"I'm always pale," she said, quickly.

"But you're awfully pale to-day; get ready, dear, and we will start."

They were soon off; she on a horse whose canter was as the easy undulations of a rocking chair, and Frank on a good strong roadster, who was highly accomplished in the matter of opening gates. For a time their course lay along the high-road, but at last they turned out of it on the brow of a hill, and rode down a steep narrow declivity, where the hedges rose so high above them that not even the fresh April air could be felt, and the stillness of the place was as the stillness of death.

"How completely out of the world. I can hardly imagine life and death going on here," Beatrix exclaimed, when they came at last to a village—or, rather, in sight of a couple of villages, for a narrow arm of a tidal river ran up and divided the two sets of houses, which bore respectively the names of Bosen and Cass. A rustic bridge crossed the water at its narrowest part; and on this they pulled up their horses, to take in what Frank declared to be the best view of the valley.

Quiet, intense quiet, that was its prevailing characteristic. The hills rose abruptly on either side of the valley, along the centre of which the river ran. For some little distance up the base of the hills, small houses crept and poised themselves in perilous places—or, at least in places that seemed perilous when looked at from below. Round most of these cottages apple orchards, in full bloom now, were thickly clustered. Down quite in the hollow, a couple of houses, of rather more imposing aspect than the others, covered with pale pink monthly roses, and backed by stacks and farm buildings, gave out signs and sounds of agricultural occupation, in the lowing of cattle, the grunting of pigs, and the quick sharp cackle of geese and hens. Nearer to the bridge, boats turned keel upwards, nets drying in the sun, and a few pilchard kegs and crab baskets, spoke of the chief trade of the quiet little place, that looked as Beatrix said, "no more than a hole in the coast."

"It is out of the world," Frank said, after a pause. "I can hardly fancy social laws obtaining here, or social obligations being regarded; yet, I can believe their lives are far more pure and moral than those led in more accessible places."

"Yes, I do believe a country life is that," Beatrix replied, absently. Then she roused herself, as some little children came out of a cottage near at hand, and added:

"Do look, Frank, what wonderfully pretty children! see that yellow-haired one, with those intensely blue eyes."

Frank stooped down and held out a penny toward the little one she indicated.

"Come here little woman," he said, "the horse won't hurt you."

The child advanced with all the honest fearlessness of his age (it was only about three years old), took the penny, applied to it that invariable childish test, its tongue, and then made a sudden, tumultuous, tumbling little rush at the horse's leg, round which it clung confidingly.

"You pretty thing, take care!" Trixy cried. "Take it away," she added, looking round at a bigger child who had kept its distance contemplatively. But before she could be obeyed—before Frank could rescue it—all in one moment, as it seemed, the impatient horse struck out with its hoof, and the little child lay senseless and crushed on the ground.

As soon as she could conquer the sickening sensation which overwhelmed her for a moment or two, Beatrix sprang from her horse, and went up to take the child, that was already in her husband's arms. It felt limp and icy cold when she touched it, and she asked, in a faltering tone, "Is it dead?"

"No; I think not; but where can one get a doctor?—where's its mother? Some of you tell me where to take it!" he cried, as three or four of the idlers that apparently spring from nowhere in an instant, even in a deserted village, came round him.

In the broad accent of the country, which I cannot do justice to in writing, he was directed to a little cottage close by; and there he wedged his steps, his helpless little burden still quiet as one dead in his arms.

Beatrix followed him, quaking. Her great dread was the child's back was broken; it hung about as if it were boneless. What should they say to its mother? she thought. How should they ever make her understand how it happened, and how blameless Frank had been?

The cottage-door opened at their knock, and they went in on such a quiet scene. An elderly woman sat by the fire knitting; the hearth was trim and tidy; a few flowers in the window-sill let the light fall in flickeringly upon a table at which a young, hard-faced, handsome woman stood ironing. At one glance Beatrix recognized a likeness to the little injured child in this woman's face, bronzed as it was by exposure to the sun

and wind. She had the same wonderful blue eyes, fringed on both lower and upper lid with black lashes. Her hair was auburn now, but yellow gleams through it proved that it had been golden as the child's. She was very handsome, very composed, until she saw what Frank carried; then she started, dropped her ironing-box and came hurriedly to them.

"She has been knocked down by my horse," Frank said, gently; "she came and clasped its leg, and before I could save her, poor little darling, she was down."

"Thank you, sir," the girl (she was scarcely more than a girl) said, taking her child from him.

"We are so grieved," Trixy said, softly. "You are its mother?"

"Yes, I am its mother," the girl said, blushing furiously. Then, while Trixy was marking that there was no wedding-ring on her finger, the elderly woman came up to them with a courtesy, and said, in a querulous tone:

"Yes, m'm, worse luck, for it's a chance child. Don't take on, Milly," she added, almost roughly, as the girl began to cry; "better for it to die than live, poor fatherless thing!" And the old woman looked for approbation of her sentiments toward the beautiful rich young lady who stood by.

For a moment Beatrix stood silent. Then, as the little child opened its eyes, and smiled and stretched itself, and they knew it had only been stunned, she went and knelt down by its mother's lap, and kissed its little white innocent brow, and nearly broke her heart with her strong fellow-feeling for it. What the old woman had coarsely called the baby, she (Beatrix) knew herself to be. Was the fact to be thrust before her perpetually?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HESITATION.

THE accident, which might have been fatal to the child—the dread she had labored under for a few moments of Frank being blamed for that accident—the remark of the little girl's grandmother—or something, she could not quite decide what, preyed painfully on Mrs. Bathurst's spirits as she rode home that day.

"It's all right, my darling. What makes you so sad now?" Frank said, rather reproachfully, coming close, and laying his hand on the pommel; "I can't bear to see you looking so cut up."

She tried hard to smile at him. She knew that this gloom, which would assert its sway over her, was a poor compliment to the man who had married her, and was bright and happy in his love for her, and who was kept in ignorance of the cause of such gloom. But she could not help herself. The smile was a very poor performance, and they both felt it to be so.

"My dear Trixy," he said, very seriously for Frank—"my dear Trixy, are you not well?"

"Yes, I am quite well, Frank," she said.

"Then are you not happy?" he asked, quickly.

"Very happy with you, Frank; do believe that."

"Then what are you not happy about? Trixy, it's no use. I seem to be very light and careless and unobtrusive, and all that sort of thing; but where I love I am not these things, and I love you; tell me, darling; I have a right to share your sorrow, if you have one."

"I was a little shocked just now, that was all," she said, falteringly; "the poor little child looked so helpless, and the mother seemed so hurt and grieved about it, and the grandmother seemed so hard and callous; it upset me a little."

"Yes, the old woman had an eye to the main chance," he said, contemptuously; she thought to make an appeal to the pity and the purse-strings of the young married lady by being pitiless to that poor thing, her daughter."

"And she only woke all my pity for the poor little child," Beatrix said, sadly—"the poor little innocent child, who does not know yet how much it is to be pitied."

"They never do feel it much in that class," he said, carelessly; "they have no traditions"—

"Frank, don't speak in that way," she said, imploringly; "I can't bear it—I can't, indeed!"

"But, my dear child, simply they have not."

"They have the traditions of virtue and purity just as much as we—as gentlepeople have."

"Yes, but they don't fall from such a height into such an abyss of shame as we do if anything of the sort befalls us," he said, energetically; "it's a living thing in our order, that family pride which we may feel in looking back through generations and saying, with truth, that all the men were brave, and all the women spotless; it's a living thing, a power in the land; a—surely you agree with me, Trixy?"

"I do; indeed I do."

"Why, on earth, then, do you look as though I were advancing frightfully heterodox or startlingly-new opinions?" Then, after a minute's pause, he added, "It's not worth our while to argue on the subject the poor little child introduced, though. Let us get down to the cliffs, dear; the sea breeze will bring back the color the fright banished. I will make you decide on a subject for me. I want to take a view on the coast, and you shall tell me which to take. Glorious all this is to be sure! This time of year down here is like a poem of Keat's."

"What will have happened to us, I wonder, before

wreathed itself about the hedge-tops. The dark-green leaves and purely-blue flowers of the periwinkle went along in sinuous curves, and a few large-eyed daisies starred the wayside garden, which no culture could have improved. There were such depths of velvety moss—such imperial clumps of golden fern—such darkly-shaded nooks, wherein water trickled and hardy young cresses grew in delicious profusion—such dazzling masses of red-gold king-cups—such long, feathery grasses—such a wreath of verdure and color, in fact, that one grew to fear that nature had been too prodigal of her gifts in that lane, and that she must, of strong necessity, fall short of her favors as soon as she got out of it. But (and here is the wonder) in this lavish western land nature enriches every spot alike. Even her cliffs are covered with a daintily-colored carpeting of moss and lichen. Her rocks have shades of red and purple over them; her sands glitter with crushed crystals; her caves sparkle with stalactites. Her pastures and commons are green with the greenness on which the eye rests lingeringly, lovingly, to which it longs to return. Her moors are magnificent mosaics; for thereon red mosses and purple heather, yellow gorse and wild white flowers, forget-me-nots and pimpernel, bluebells and wild thyme are mingled by a faultless Artist's hand. And her lofty hills draw the clouds, and her dense woods shelter the land, so her beauty is never sunburnt, but is always fresh as from a recent bath.

Mrs. Bathurst's thoughts were very far from the beauties of the land when they came out of the lane and got upon a wide down, at the extreme end of which the sea tumbled and roared over and amidst rocks that were limpet and weed-covered. She had worked herself up into such a miserable state of mind that no external object could appeal to her. As she dwelt more and more in bitter secrecy upon this deep, terrible truth, which Marian had made known to her today, she could not clear her brow and give the smiles that he sought to the husband who had just asked for her hearty coincidence in his belief that it was a living thing in their order, that "pride in being able to look back through generations and avow that all the men were brave and all the women spotless."

She was very miserable—pitifully miserable—and there was no acting blood in poor Trixy. She could not seem to be more bright and light-hearted than she really was, though she knew that her depression would give rise to suspicions which she could not satisfactorily allay; moreover, she was one of those women on whom mental suffering has a speedy physical ill effect. Her side began to ache, and her head to feel heavy, and she could not at all enjoy the glorious burst of sea-view which Frank had told himself "must surely rouse her."

"I don't believe you care for the country a bit, Trixy," he said, disappointedly, when they had stood for about five minutes contemplating the surging waves in silence.

"What, Frank?—indeed I do!"

"Anyway you don't care for this. You look bored. You will be happier when we get up to town, and you can go out and pace about in the Row."

"I wish we were not going to town," she said, energetically; "I do, Frank; I like being here far better; I am happier here."

"My dear child, you'll give some of your old friends rather a queer notion of your happiness if you look as you do now when you go back to the world. I confess I don't understand women." Frank spoke as if he were both hurt and offended.

"But Frank," she began.

"Oh, don't trouble yourself to explain anything that you would rather leave unexplained, Beatrix," he interrupted, rather stiffly.

"You don't understand me," she said almost pitifully. And then she was going on to tell him that, as far as he was concerned, she was very happy, and perfectly well satisfied, and that he must not imagine she was sad or regretful whenever a shade of thought crept over her face. But he would scarcely listen to this, being nominally anxious to get "along the coast," and in reality being pained out of all power of listening.

"Frank," she said, when they had ridden some way in silence, "be a little lenient to a woman's foolish nervousness; I was very silly to suffer myself to be upset, that I admit. You won't be gloomy to me any longer?"

"Is it to me that the charge of gloominess this day applies?" Mr. Bathurst replied, carelessly. "I should not have thought so if I had been called upon to decide; however, it doesn't matter, gloom or sunshine, we evidently are not always to have honeymoon weather."

"Don't say that," she murmured, giving him a glance of yearning, pleading affection at the same time; "we have always had it till to-day, Frank, and to-day the gloom has come!"

"Heaven knows how!" he interrupted; "I don't, at least. I'm delighted to hear that it was a mere passing cloud; sadness and darkness don't agree with me. Dull looks irritate me, Trixy. If you have anything to be dull about, tell me, and the mere speaking of it will exorcise the demon; if you sit and brood over things, and make yourself look old and ill, I shall be a good deal more annoyed than you will care to annoy me, I fancy."

"I am not in the habit of brooding over things."

"Yes, you are. All women are. No, I don't think Blanche would brood over anything. I believe she would have it out and have done with it, whatever the consequences."

Trixys heart began to beat painfully as her husband spoke. It seemed to her that Frank must have an inkling of the truth, otherwise, why should he press on her the duty and propriety of confiding in him, and so extol Blanche for an honesty and truthfulness which she had not been called upon to practice? "If I told him, nothing could be gained, and a great deal would

be all about us?" Trixy said, as they turned into a narrow lane, in which the very spirit of spring seemed to have been embodied. The sloping banks of the high hedges were thickly covered with pale primroses and large intensely violet dog-violets; forcing their way up among these, the young curly fronds of the hart's-tongue and royal male fern advanced their beautiful claim to consideration. Honey-suckle, in thick, full clusters,

be lost," she repeated to herself; "he would never be quite happy if he had the knowledge that his wife was basely born; and if he were unhappy about me, I should never know a peaceful hour." Then she fell to thinking the subject over again in all its bearings, and no amount of thought made it more manageable or less terrible, while it did, on the other hand, make her dull, sad, and silent again.

"It's rather unfortunate that we should be going to spend this evening alone, Trixy," Frank said, when they were riding home. "A third person would have broken this monotony, which is becoming oppressive to you."

"Now you know I am never so happy as when I am alone with you, Frank," she said, looking at him with tears in her eyes.

"You are very good to say so," he replied, laughing; "and as there is no one but Mrs. Lyon to be got to relieve us of ourselves, I wish I could believe you. It's that letter from your sister, Mrs. Sutton, has done it, I feel pretty sure. I suppose she has narrated one of her creditable escapades to you, and you're disgusted or 'wounded,' as women call it, at being connected with her. Now have I not hit the right nail on the head at last, Trixy?"

"No, indeed, no," she said, wishing heartily the while that her connection with Marian had been a far better authenticated thing than it was.

"Then I give you up for this evening," he said, laughing, "and shall fall back upon my original idea of asking Mrs. Lyon to come and dine with us. She will talk to me and smile at me, and you know how I must be talked to and smiled at. Shall we stop in the village and ask her?"

"Yes," Trixy said, eagerly. She foresaw in Mrs. Lyon's presence a guard against further questioning and remark for that evening at least. Accordingly they stopped at Mrs. Lyon's cottage and asked her if she would be ready, as usual, if they sent down the carriage for her, and she acquiesced in the arrangement, and so Trixy had no great strain on her powers of concealment when she met her husband at dinner. That is to say, there was no positive and actual present strain on her powers of concealment; but, after all, it was but a brief respite, and so widely different in its resting power to a total cessation of dread. By-and-by, in one of the many long hours her husband and she must of necessity spend with each other without the saving presence of a third person, his mind would surely revert to Marian's letter and the way his wife had received it. And then, when his mind did so revert to the disturbing cause, in what way was she to set it at rest again? How was she ever to satisfy and reassure the man whom she had deceived, whom she had been compelled against her better judgment to deceive, because of the sins of others.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TOLD!

THE end of May saw the Bathursts settled in town for the season and (Mrs. Bathurst, at least) satiated with society. The pretty, well-placed, newly-married woman was horribly unhappy, and her unhappiness was patent to her husband, and the cause of it was a sealed book. Very much to the surprise of the two or three who had known Beatrix best in her unmarried days, her tastes and feelings in the matter of friends and acquaintances appeared to have undergone a complete change. She shunned Blanche and sought Marian, and this was a change that did not commend itself to Frank Bathurst; for in spite of all the toleration shown and precautions taken by Mark Sutton, hard things were said of his wife. The presence of Ellen Bowden no longer gave a coloring of respectability to the intimacy with Mr. Eldale, for Ellen had gone home.

Ellen Bowden had gone home sorely discomfited and very sad. For several months she had seen bright visions and dreamed fair dreams, and now at last she was compelled to awake to a dingy reality. She had been dazzled and delighted into a feeling of something almost resembling affection for this pretty aunt, who was to her the tangible representative of the fabled world of fashion. It was hard on Ellen, therefore, to have that feeling dashed to pieces after months of cultivation by the discovery that she had been a cat's-paw in the fair hands of Mrs. Sutton. The dream of marrying Mr. Eldale had been a joyous one. The waking to the knowledge that she had been deceived only by her own vanity and Marian's vicious deceit (the man himself had thought too little of her even to try to deceive her) was a cruel one.

So she had gone home humbled and heart-stricken—gone home to wake to other truths which were equally hard and cruel. The old love of her childhood, which she had slighted and scorned, and foolishly tested, had snapped. She could have turned back to John Wilmot now and have loved him as well as ever. As well? she could have loved him better, for she had learned to appreciate his possession of certain qualities, from having found that others lacked them. But it was too late. He could not love her again; he could not trust her again. It had been a terrible wrench to his heart when she first forced it from her; but though the smarting was not over now, the hand that had wounded was powerless to heal. John Wilmot had buried his dead and could be friendly with her, but his love was gone from her, and the sole comfort she had was in the assertion his mother made that it would never center on any one else. Theirs had been a brief romance; but, after all perhaps, the blight did not come to them sooner than it does to the great majority of the solitary men and women who live and die alone and apparently unloved.

After Miss Bowden's departure people talked in the way people will talk about Mr. Eldale's attentions to Mrs. Sutton. Marian had long ceased to desire him to marry her husband's niece. She liked to keep his adul-

ation and his presents to herself; and after a time her vanity grew, and she became more reckless, even to the extent of boasting of these things, and then people talked.

"Whether there's harm in it or not, they know best themselves," Frank Bathurst said, angrily, to Beatrix one morning; "all I know is, I won't have my wife mixed up with it. You shall not be driving about with Mrs. Sutton in a bonnet and burnous that Eldale has given her."

"What can I say to her when she asks me?"

"Say what you like; the truth is the best. Say I won't let you. She'll hardly urge you to dispute your husband's authority, I suppose. If she wants a reason for my disliking it I will give it to her."

"Oh! pray don't Frank," Trixy pleaded. She was in thrall to Marian, she knew, although they had never spoken of that secret which gave Marian the power.

"Then you must keep clear of her."

"I can't forbid my sister my house," Trixy said, proudly; "if you like to do it you will, but I cannot."

"I don't want you to forbid her your house; let her come, but for Heaven's sake let her come respectfully, and not bring that fellow Eldale. She goes to the theater alone with him, and parades his devotion as none but a mad or bad woman would."

"Oh dear, I'm miserably placed," Trixy said, sadly; "it will make a quarrel with Marian, but I will tell her if you like."

"Make a quarrel—who cares?" Frank replied. "For my own part, I so thoroughly dislike and despise Marian that I can't bear her to come in contact with my wife. Make a quarrel—the sooner the better—with such a combination of deceit and frivolity as Mrs. Sutton."

"Then I am to tell her"—Beatrix began, but Frank interrupted her.

"Tell her what you like, dear, only for my sake don't be seen so much with Marian. She tells her husband she's 'coming here' or she's 'going out with Trixy,' and he thinks it's all right, not supposing that Eldale is at her side always."

"I will try to see less of her," Trixy said, quietly.

"You don't mean to tell me that you approve of Marian's conduct?" Frank asked, quickly.

She would tell the truth where she dared.

"No, I do not; no, certainly I do not," she said, emphatically.

"Then why aid and abet and encourage her? My dear Trixy, you are inconsistent."

"I dare say I am," she replied: "every one is more or less inconsistent, apparently, to those who do not understand or care."

"When you tell me I don't understand you, you state a fact; that is your own fault, not mine. When you say I don't care for you, Trixy, you tell an untruth. Marian's atmosphere has been more fatal to you than I feared even."

He left the room saying that, and Trixy was left to chew the cud of most bitter meditation alone. Here she was, through "no fault of her own," she told herself, "getting wrong with her husband in these early months of their married life, which ought to have been their happiest time." Through no fault of hers, and certainly through no fault of his, for Frank had not spoken until he had received great provocation. Mrs. Sutton was carrying on a flagrant flirtation with Mr. Eldale—a flirtation that apparently justified the hardest things that were said about her, and the things said were very hard. It was no wonder that Frank desired his wife to keep herself aloof from the contamination there is in such an example as Mrs. Sutton offered.

But how was she to keep herself aloof from it? Through the thin vail of affection and sympathy for her which Marian draped herself in, Trixy saw the utter, calculating selfishness of the woman. It was not love for her sister, and longing for wholesome female companionship which prompted Mrs. Sutton to see Mrs. Bathurst and display herself as much as possible in Mrs. Bathurst's society. It was simply that she wanted the protection of Mrs. Bathurst's mantle of respectability to be shed over her. While her husband confided in, and the Bathursts countenanced her, the world had no right and no reason to talk, she said.

But this countenance and support from the Bathursts was to be withdrawn, and Trixy knew that Marian would bitterly resent such withdrawal. What form her resentment would take was a sad mystery still to Mrs. Bathurst; but that it would fall upon her heavily she did not doubt for one moment.

Marian came to her as usual that day just after luncheon—came with an earnest request that "Trixie would help her with a little difficulty. Mark had wanted her to go to Lionel's house with him that evening, and she had refused, pleading a previous engagement with Trixy. If Mark should chance to ask Trixy about it at any time, would she be careful?"

"Yes, I will be careful, Marian," Trixy replied; "that is, I will not say you had no engagement with me. I can't tell a story for you; besides, why won't you go to Lionel and Blanche?"

"Because I hate Blanche for one reason," Marian burst out, vehemently; "and because I have something better to do for another. You are scrupulous enough about deceiving my husband—how about deceiving your own?"

"At any rate, my deception toward Frank is not practiced to his discredit in any way; it is because I regard his feelings and his happiness so highly that I keep my secret."

"And I keep mine for the same reason," Marian laughed. "Mark would not be happier any more than Frank if his wife confided in him."

"How can you speak so lightly?"

"How can you ask such feeble questions? Will you do as I ask you, Trixy?—or do you mean to force me to be conscientious and tell Frank? It will be less pain-

ful to me to wound his fine sensibilities now than it would have been some time since; for he has been cool to me lately. If he is as just, and kind, and loving as you declare him to be, he will not blame you."

"He will now," Trixy said, in a dejected tone. "Oh, Marian, how could I have been such a fool as to have trusted to your generosity? How can you take pleasure in the prospect of making us miserable?"

"I don't—it's the principle of self-preservation at work within me," Marian replied, carelessly. "Besides, I like to see romantic sentimental boasts proved the windy things they are. You wearied me with your vaunts of Frank's disinterested affection; his love is hardly worth the name you give it, if it fails you for such a trifle."

"I have made it worse than it was at first—I won't suffer it to grow weightier by concealment any longer," Trixy said, suddenly. "I will tell him myself."

Mrs. Sutton got up from her chair, and went nearer to her sister, holding down her face to kiss Trixy's cheek.

"Don't be rash because I was cross and unkind for a minute," she said, in her sweetest, softest tones; "don't you, poor reckless child; don't risk your life's happiness in that way; you would break your heart if Frank grew cold to you; and" (she continued with a sneer) "if you wound his pride he will grow cold to you, for your husband is no hero, Trixy—believe me."

"I had better risk my happiness myself than let you wreck it."

"But I will keep your secret still," Marian said, contemptuously. "You will not speak a word to help me, but I will hold my tongue to aid you."

"But, Marian, you do not want my help for any good," Trixy said, earnestly. "Frank was saying to-day that—that—"

"That what?" Marian asked, sharply.

"That people are talking about your flirtation with Mr. Eldale."

"Blanche has been at him," Mrs. Sutton said, with her face burning with blushes. "Blanche and Lionel believe the worst of me, and they will make Edgar and Frank do the same."

"We rarely see Blanche and Lionel; they work hard and we are idlers; our hours don't agree."

"You may not see Blanche very often—but Frank does."

"Marian!"

"Curb your indignation: he does, I tell you; he was there yesterday morning, for Mark happened to call."

"And why should he not be there?" Trixy asked, impatiently. "My own brother—surely my husband may go to see him?"

"And his old love, your brother's wife; those who live in glass houses, you remember? Frank had better not make any more remarks about Arthur Eldale and me. We are coming to luncheon with you to-morrow."

"Indeed you must not, Marian; indeed it is not right; while such reports are circulated I will not receive Mr. Eldale and you alone."

Marian laughed.

"How grateful you are to me for respecting your secrets—it's not much I ask you in return."

"It is too much, Marian; you know it is too much; it would be a bad return indeed if I encouraged you."

"In what?"

"In your mad course: where can it end? do you ever ask yourself that question? do you ever tell yourself that there is shame and wickedness in the way in which you try to make that man love you?"

"Try! I have not to try very much."

"And you can boast of it! Oh! Marian, how can it end?"

"Perhaps—well—better than you think," Marian replied, in confusion. "At any rate, understand that you won't improve the case by thwarting me and throwing obstacles in our path; let us be friends, Trixy," she added, suddenly holding out her hand; "help me and I'll help you."

"I cannot enter into such a compact; you are misled by a wild, wicked hope—do banish it, Marian. 'Help you' in such a matter—how can you ask me to do it?"

She put her hands pleadingly and lovingly on Mrs. Sutton's shoulders. "Give up this man and his flatteries," she whispered; "save yourself—let me help you to do that!"

But Mrs. Sutton put the hands and the plea aside, and went away in anger, leaving Trixy feeling very sorrowful and uncertain about many things.

It was true, as she had said, that they saw very little of Lionel and Blanche. London distances are great obstacles to intercourse between people whose ways of life differ as widely as did those of the Bathursts' and Lionel Talbot's. These latter had but little time for other recreation than each other's society in their intervals of work. It was a wearing business for them to get from their inaccessible suburb to Frank Bathurst's house in Belgravia; and when they did get there the probability was that Trixy was out, and nothing was left for them to do but to get home again by the same bewildering line of omnibuses which had brought them. It is true that they went to dinner parties and dances at the Bathursts', but then Trixy was as inaccessible to the individual as their suburb. Often, too, Mrs. Bathurst and her husband would ride or drive out to see Lionel and Blanche; but the former would be in the studio and the latter writing in the room above him, and the visitors could not help the depressing idea that they were fell interruptions to their host and hostess taking possession of them. Altogether the quadrilateral deemed it best to come to an amiable understanding on the subject, which Blanche worded as follows:

"While we are poor and busy, Trixy, we can't regard social claims in the daytime; we shall never fancy you neglect us, or any nonsense of that sort; and you, in turn, must promise not to think that we are more absorbed in our occupation than we are obliged to be; I

really believe that the less we are disturbed the better."

"But I don't like the idea of your not coming to us a great deal," Trixy said.

"And I should like the idea of coming often immensely, if it didn't involve so much trouble; if, when I get up with my brain aching and my imagination worn out, I could refresh both by getting on horseback, or into a comfortable carriage, I should seek you with delight, Trixy; but I can't do that; I have to walk out and find an omnibus, and then get in with all sorts of unpleasant people, very often, and travel along in a state I hate; by the time I reach your house I'm worn out and not good company for you. Now isn't it better I should stay at home and make myself agreeable to my husband?"

"Well, certainly it is," Trixy said; "but I shall be very glad when you are not poor and busy any longer."

"So shall we," Blanche said, laughing; "mean-time we won't misunderstand each other."

This conversation had taken place some time before that one which has been recorded between Beatrix and Marian on the subject of Mr. Eldale. It did, therefore, appear very strange to the young wife that her husband should have seen the Lionel Talbots without mentioning the fact to her. She brooded over the strangeness of it in solitude for a long time after Marian left her, and at last she ordered her carriage, with the determination of going to see if Blanche would tell her of Frank's visit, and be altogether open.

Before she left the house Frank came and spoke to her.

"Marian has been here, I find," he said, standing holding the door of Trixy's dressing-room in his hand.

"Yes, she has," Trixy said, hesitatingly.

"Have you anything to tell me?" he questioned, rather meaningly, Beatrix thought.

"Nothing," she replied, coldly; then she looked at Frank, and repented herself of the coldness, and went over to him and put her arms around his neck.

"Yes, Frank—I spoke to her about Mr. Eldale. I hurt her, I fear—at any rate I annoyed her."

"You made her understand that you would not lend yourself to that unhealthiness? for it is moral unhealthiness; you made her clearly understand that?"

"I did—and she was very much annoyed."

"And is that all you have to tell me, Trixy?" he said, holding her off and looking at her very fondly and very fixedly.

"Why do you ask?" she said, nervously.

"Why do I, indeed?" he said, moving his hands, and turning away. "Good-by, dear—you're going out, I see. I won't question you again."

He closed the door as he said that, and she stood still for a minute wondering, and feeling a little frightened. Why had he said that he "would not question her again"? Had he a doubt—a suspicion? and if he had, by whom had they been implanted?

She turned back to her glass and finished her dressing, feeling in a fury—feeling how futile that fury was—how feeble! and for all the futility and feebleness of it, how much the reverse of womanly it was! Futile and feeble! does not every woman feeling her wrath to be such, at some time or other of her life, echo the Egyptian queen's craving for masculine stature: "Had I thy inches, thou shouldest know there was a heart in Egypt?"

Some one had implanted a doubt and a suspicion in her husband's breast. There was a sting to her in that; but there was a sharper sting in the dread she had that Blanche had done it—Blanche, that cousin whom her husband had loved once, and on whom he called in secret now! She could not put on her bonnet to please herself as she thought of all this—as she realized her helplessness and took this truth home to her heart, that "being married" did not mean independent bliss by any means.

Blanche was at home when Mrs. Bathurst inquired; but Blanche was "very busy," she said, as she came forward into the room and held out her face to kiss her sister-in-law—"very busy finishing a little story, that I have been asked to write for a new magazine," she continued, in explanation; "and I dare not be late with copy, you see, Trixy; they could do without me very well, and they would let me feel that fact if I were not prompt in supplying their demand."

"You never have time for morning visitors, have you?" Trixy replied.

"No, never. I really never have time to spare to them."

"Yet you sacrifice yourself sometimes to special friends and favorites?"

"Well, very rarely, Trixy. You're a special friend and favorite, and I am not going to sacrifice myself to you this morning, for instance. I am going to ask you to go and talk to Lionel, and to excuse me; I must write."

"Absurd affection!" Mrs. Bathurst muttered to herself, as Mrs. Lionel Talbot ushered her up to Lionel's studio; "the first writers of the day would not give themselves such airs about sparing a little time from their literary labors." After the manner of outsiders, she forgot that the first writers of the day can place their productions where and when they please, while those whose feet are still on the lowest round of the ladder are compelled to be actively grateful whenever an opportunity of serial publication is offered to them.

Lionel was putting the finishing strokes to a picture in which he had immortalized the (to him) surpassing beauty and charms of his wife in a subject that illustrated his idea of these words:

"Heavens! how desperately do I adore

Thy winning graces; to be thy defender

I hotly burn; to be a Calidore—

A very red-cross knight—a stout Leander,

Might I be loved by thee like these of yore.

Light feet, dark-violet eyes, and parted hair,
Soft dimpled hands, white neck, and heaving
breast,

Are things on which the dazzled senses rest,
Till the fond fixed eyes forget they stare."

It was a lovely realization of Keats's glorious ideal, and Trixy felt more kindly toward Blanche as she stood gazing on these pictured charms.

"I believe you do desperately adore Blanche, Lionel," she said, after looking at it for a few moments.

"I should rather think I do," he replied; "Blanche can make any one adore her."

"Blanche might be contented with your admiration, now, I should think," his sister said, quickly. Then the strong need that she felt for help and sympathy overcame all her little, unworthy, jealous dreads, and she exclaimed: "Tell me, Lal, was Frank here yesterday?"

"Yes," Lionel said, gravely, "he was here, Trixy. You are not unhappier for his having been here, and for what Blanche told him, are you?"

"What Blanche told him!—what do you mean?" Mrs. Bathurst asked, nervously. "Everybody seems to have something to tell my husband. First Marian threatens me, and now Blanche—"

"Has rendered Marian's threat of no avail, happily," Mrs. Lionel Talbot interrupted, coming into the room, followed by Frank Bathurst; and then there was a little scene of explanation and reconciliation.

It appeared that Marian's secret respecting her sister's birth had become known to Mark Sutton also, and he had confided it to Blanche. The latter, for all her own press of work and "busy"-ness generally, had found time to see and regret that constant companionship between Mrs. Sutton and Mrs. Bathurst which was so offensive to Frank. Blanche understood her two sisters-in-law, and, understanding them, she felt assured that there was some other cause than congeniality at the bottom of the intimacy that was working ill for Trixy. After some talk with Frank, during which Trixy's uneasiness on the receipt of Marian's letter was mentioned, Mrs. Lionel Talbot came to the conclusion that Mrs. Sutton was exerting undue influence over her sister. Then Mark Sutton, remembering his old promise of being "her friend," should the chance of being one to her ever be offered to him, came and gave counsel to Blanche on the subject. "Poor Trixy has been weak," he said, "but she will never be happy till Frank knows all she does about herself. You see I cannot speak to Frank myself without blaming Marian, and no man shall ever hear me blame my wife, Mrs. Talbot: but he ought to know it; indeed he ought; no good comes of a woman deceiving her husband, in ever so small a thing."

"What would you have me do? I might be blamed for interfering."

"Risk that blame. You're a brave woman, and this stake of Beatrix's happiness is worth playing boldly for. Don't blame Marian to Bathurst more than you can help—will you?" he added, wistfully.

"No, I will not," Blanche had said, with tears in her eyes; "and we will set Trixy straight with Frank, and he shall feel that your share in it counterbalances Marian's evil counsel."

"Thank you," Mark Sutton said. I can't bear anyone to think hardly of Marian, though she doesn't care much for what I feel," he added, attempting to smile, and breaking down in the attempt.

So Blanche had written to Frank, and Frank had come at her request; and then she, being "brave enough to play boldly for the stakes of Trixy's happiness," had told him the secret which had been so terrible to Beatrix. And he, quite satisfied with the strength and purity of the Bathurst family-tree, root and branch, had declined to be shocked, or sorry, or shamed by the announcement of his wife's right to the bar-sinister. "But the less Trixy sees of Mrs. Sutton the better, however hard my decision may seem to dear old Lark," he said, in conclusion.

So peace—perfect peace—was restored to the principal members of the family, whose fortunes I have traced through a period of adversity. After a while prosperity dawned on them again, for Edgar, though he did not make a fortune, made enough to repay Lionel the money he had lost for him, and so the days came sooner than Blanche had anticipated when they were neither "too busy nor too poor" to see their friends and fulfill social claims.

Their peace was marred in a measure by a step which Mrs. Sutton took. She eloped with Mr. Eldale, and explained her reasons for doing so in a cleverly-worded letter of attempted vindication to Beatrix. "My aspirations were baffled by my family when I was a girl," she wrote; "I was forced into an uncongenial marriage; I shall realize them when I gain my freedom through a divorce; then Arthur Eldale will marry me at once."

She regained her freedom, for Mark Sutton died of what doctors called "heart complaint," before the divorce could be procured. But the high stakes for which the pretty widow had played with wicked skill and daring she lost after all. Directly she became attainable she had ceased to be interesting to Mr. Eldale. Accordingly, he left the path of evil, at the bidding of a pretty girl of eighteen, who had called him "so charming" before he met with Mrs. Sutton, and who mentioned that he was "so wicked" now, as if it were an additional charm. He believed that it was her "youth and innocence" which made her utterly regardless of his well-known derelictions from respectability: and as he was happy in that belief, she did not undeceive him until after they were married.

THE END.

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